



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

WILLIAM
·H·
CARRUTH





**LETTERS TO
AMERICAN BOYS**

1

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

BY

WILLIAM H. CARRUTH
"

VICE-CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS



STANFORD LIBRARY

BOSTON
THE BEACON PRESS
25 BEACON STREET

Per

COPYRIGHT, 1905
By P. F. COLLIER & SON

811.3
C31L

549184

*Reprinted from THE HOUSEHOLD LIBRARY
by kind permission of P. F. Collier & Son*

PA 11.000 546

VSAAJEL! OSOYNAT?

LETTERS TO
AMERICAN BOYS

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

THE MANAGEMENT OF PARENTS

MY DEAR JOE:

As I looked at the top of my head this evening when I came in from the tennis-court I discovered several gray hairs. Therefore I know that I am ripe for giving advice and I shall begin on you. I should not do this if you had not been telling me the other day of some of your difficulties, for volunteer advice is not much more useful than "volunteer" corn. If you don't know what that is, ask some country friend. I knew a solemn clergyman years ago who used to look at the plate which his wife had heaped for him at dinner and say in Websterian tones, "All my life long I have been overhelped to potatoes." Most boys, I think, feel that they are overhelped to advice. Girls do not seem to suffer from this affliction. Is that because they are all right anyway? Or do the men who have advice to spare not think it worth while to spend it on girls?

You were telling me that you find it hard to feel intimate with your father, to feel toward him as you have been taught that you ought to feel. Now that is a very common complaint. I have had that difficulty myself, and in turn I am sure that my boy has the same trouble. I used to think that I was very wicked because I felt so—felt this lack of affection or cordiality toward my father. But I know that you and John are not wicked, and I believe now that I was not very bad. It is really a practical question, a question

About
helping
boys to
advise

Intimacy
with one's
father

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

A question of family diplomacy of family diplomacy, and for that very reason we may be able to come to some helpful conclusion about it.

The management of parents It is the question of the management of parents. We hear a good deal of discussion—we older folks do—of the management of children. We have mothers' clubs devoted to this problem, and very funny things they say in them sometimes, and funny people talk in them—people very often who have no children at all. But sometimes I think it would be a good thing to have a convention of children—not too young children, of course—to discuss the management of parents. Did you ever hear what Oliver Wendell Holmes said about education—that we must begin by educating our great-grandparents? We can't very well do that; but it is possible to train our parents if we go at it in the right spirit, aiming to do them good as well as ourselves. Privately, Joe, I think you had better not show this to any older people because they might think that I am betraying my own side of the case. But this brings out the very trouble—there ought not to be two sides to the matter of the interests of parents and children. If we are to have a convention on the subject, wouldn't it be well to assume that there is no division of interests and to have a convention of parents *and* children?

To get the father's point of view In such a convention, as in all conventions that are to accomplish anything, it would be assumed to begin with that all parties meant well and were willing to be instructed so as to avoid mistakes and serve better the good of all. Now the first step toward learning how to manage a man is to understand him, to get his point of view. I know that your father is trying to be a good father, and I believe that you will admit this, too. But he doesn't seem to have any time left for loving you. He seems to you to be too dreadfully ab-

THE MANAGEMENT OF PARENTS

sorbed in his work, and not to be interested in what you are doing. It seems to you as though he never was like yourself—as though he never was young.

Now, Joe, I am going to tell you a few things about your father that will give you a chance to understand him and to get at him in a way that will do you both good. Joe, your father is only an old boy. There are fellows in Cleveland, where he grew up, who call him "Old Boy" when they meet him. Actual An old boy fact. There are other old boys with gray heads who call him "Joe" to his face, and he calls them "Bill" and "Jack" and what not. They talk to one another, when they meet almost as you and my John do. They joke and tell stories about one another and laugh loud and long; and one day, not long ago, at the Merchants' Outing, they lay on their backs and kicked up their heels at the blue sky and afterward had a friendly game of mumblypeg. Your father does not realize that he is an old man. Day after day ever since he was your age he has gone on feeling like a boy. But he has just gotten into the habit of being staid and sober when you are about. He doesn't mean it, and it would do him good if you could get him out of it. The habit of being staid and sober

I wish you could have been with them that day at the Merchants' Outing. I almost wish that you could call your father "Old Boy," as the other men of his set do. I would much rather hear it than "The Old Man," as some boys call their father. But what I tell you about his feelings is true. Why, Joe, he actually used to gallop round the room on all fours with you on his back, and if you weren't so heavy he would probably do it now if you asked him to. But probably that isn't the best thing to begin with. I would ask A youthful heart mother, I believe, what he used to play when he was a young man—she will know. And then I would ask Ask about the games he played

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

him the very next time he comes home to tell you about that game. And then, next, I would watch for a good chance, and get him to show you and John and the rest of your "gang" how to play it. And, Joe, if you and the boys like, I wouldn't mind coming out too. That is one way.

Or if he doesn't remember, or if the game is too slow—for that seems to be the way with many of the games that were played in my day—I would get him to come out and umpire the next game of baseball or football. He may not be up on the rules, but it will tickle him to be asked, you may be sure of that; and he may not admit that he doesn't know the rules. If he doesn't, let it go and act as though it were all right. He will learn after a while. Don't forget to go home with him after the game and ask him to come out again.

If possible I would hunt up some game that he would enjoy playing with you, and I would play that once in a while, just to humor him, you know. Perhaps the other boys would enjoy going in with you on such a deal. Golf, for instance, is such a game, and I have known some boys of your age who made it interesting for grown men. But the idea is, you see, to get him out with you and to get him interested. After that you can do almost anything with a man, even your own father.

As to your mother, Joe. I think you do not need to manage her. I notice that she does about everything you want her to, and, besides, no end of things that you would never think of. And I was very glad to see how proud you seemed to be of her as you escorted her down the street the other day. A woman always needs taking care of, and mothers are so apt to overdo unless we watch them. A boy ought to be

Invite him
to umpire
your game

Or play
one of his
games

Joe's pride
in his
mother

BROTHER BILL AND SISTER SUE

his mother's lover; and a boy who has practiced in courting his mother is sure to become a thoroughbred gentleman. A boy who is very busy, as you are, with school and football and carrying papers and reading, is often tempted to take mother for granted. But it isn't safe. They are not of cast-steel, and they don't last forever. We must humor them, Joe, and spare them, and appreciate them. I shall never forget the bright vision of a French boy of about your age, whom I used to watch from my window in the Rue Bergere in Paris. Every morning, after he had brought in the wood and swept off the doorstep, he came round, when ready for school, to the window where his mother was working, took off his cap and rose on his tiptoes to receive her kiss on his forehead. And then he saluted and marched away.

How to
become a
gentleman

A French
boy

You see the idea. In managing parents, as in managing other people, the important thing is to get on good terms with them and make them like us. And to do this we must try to put them under obligations and to love them.

The impor-
tant thing

YOUR UNCLE WILLIAM.

BROTHER BILL AND SISTER SUE

DEAR HOWARD:

There is no reason why it should be harder to get along with one's own brothers and sisters than with the brothers and sisters of other people. When we were at the Hanleys the other day I noticed that you seemed surprised to see the young people of the family joking and playing together as though they actually enjoyed one another's company. There were Anna and Mary singing together, and Harry and Andy building a boat together, and Jessie and Mrs.

Enjoying
your
sister's
company

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

Hanley planning a little joke upon big Sam, who has such a tremendous appetite. And how heartily they all laughed when, in a perfectly matter-of-course way, Jessie set down before Sam his portion of oatmeal in a milk-basin! And Sam laughed as heartily as any one.

Natural
friends

Of course, a fellow's brothers and sisters ought to be his friends. But they are not always. Living together in the same house, with all the opportunities for doing one another favors, it ought to be easy and natural to make friends of them. But somehow we fall into a way of looking at them as a matter of course, of taking for granted all the good they do us, and forgetting that they often need our own sympathy and support in turn. I knew a boy once who came to realize this in his own experience, and who got out of this bad way of looking at his sisters by making up his mind to forget that they belonged to him and to treat them as though they were the sisters of some other boy. It worked beautifully. He presently found himself lifting his cap when he passed one of them, and insisting on escorting another to the neighbor's house round the corner when she wanted to run over for an evening's visit, and even of bringing home to them a box of caramels out of his pocket money.

How to
treat
sisters

Jolly good
companions

You say that your sister is cross most of the time and calls you a nuisance. The Manning girls didn't call George a nuisance—his name was George Manning—and he found that his sisters were jolly good companions. It worked out to everybody's advantage in ways that probably wouldn't interest you now. For instance, George found home and home company so pleasant that the family began to fear that he would become an old bachelor. But finally, when he really

BROTHER BILL AND SISTER SUE

became interested in other girls than his own sisters, he knew so well how to treat them, and his reputation was so good, that, as one mother remarked, he could have had his pick of all the nicest girls in town. Besides that, it increased the esteem in which George's sisters were held, for people said, 'Those Manning girls must be very attractive to win the attentions of their brother in this way.' This was the George Manning who played first base for three years on our college nine.

Results to
boy and
sisters

I spoke of the danger of regarding our brothers and sisters as belonging to us. Now it is curious about that. Some people seem inclined to slight and belittle whatever belongs to them. Whatever other people have is better than anything they themselves have. You have a good jack-knife, but you are always thinking how much better you could whittle with Charlie Brown's. You think other people's clothes fit better than yours, and other people's horses trot faster than yours, and other people's houses are prettier and more comfortable than the one you live in. Understand, I don't mean you, personally, Howard; I mean by "you" the fellow who has that sort of disposition or habit.

People who
belittle
whatever
they have

On the other hand, there are people who think, or who seem to think, that whatever they have is the best there is going. Their clothes and their horses and their houses are just right, and their children and all their relatives are perfection, and can do no wrong and make no mistakes. People of this sort are sometimes very exasperating and tiresome, I must admit. But, on the whole, wouldn't you rather associate with this sort than with those who are always discontented and running down their own things?

Others who
magnify

I know what you are thinking: that they might

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

We can
live and
act our
apprecia-
tion

learn to keep it to themselves. And I agree with you, Howard. But there is one way in which it can be expressed without doing any one any harm. We can live it and act it. No one will object if we treat our own folks as though they were the best in the world. Not to the extent of being family hogs—for there are family hogs as well as individual hogs—but in matters of personal intercourse and friendship. No one ought to think too well of himself; neither should he think too ill of himself. And if we slight our own possessions and our own kin, it is, in a way, slighting ourselves.

What teas-
ing is

It is pretty hard to draw the line between playing and teasing, isn't it? And, on the whole, teasing is mean. If the one whom we try to tease isn't teased, then it isn't teasing. But whether we mean it or not, when playful jesting teases or vexes, then, or a little earlier, it is time to stop. I had a brother whom I adored, in spite of the fact that he was a fearful tease. He could tease me by merely looking at me. He began, perhaps, by making a picture of me on his slate and showing it to me across the table. I appealed to mother, and he was ordered to stop it. Then he would titter and tilt his nose. Again I would appeal to mother. He would declare that he had done nothing, and then he would simply glance up at me over his slate, derisively, but without moving a feature, until I tearfully exclaimed, "Ma, make Ed. stop looking at me."

Cowardice
in teasing

Did you ever notice that the fellow who teases is almost always bigger than the one he teases? Well, it is true. There is usually a little cowardice in a tease. He knows he deserves to be thrashed and that his victim can not give him his deserts. At any rate, if a boy wants to tease, let him take one of his size,

PICK UP YOUR MANNERS

not a girl or a smaller boy, nor a particularly sensitive boy. But there wouldn't be much fun in teasing with all these left out, would there? The fact is, teasing is merely a sort of mental bear-baiting or bull-fighting.

If I had my boyhood to live over again I would try to think of my brothers and sisters as just as good as any other boys and girls; perhaps a little better, as, in fact, I know they were. And I would think that common-sense required that I should make all I could of them, both for their sakes and my own. I have sometimes thought how fine and interesting it would be to organize a large family into a club, for almost any sort of purpose, literary or athletic. Even a small family could form itself into a company. Suppose you try that in yours. Only a few days ago I heard of a family of four boys and one girl, who with the father and the mother formed an orchestra. They practiced every morning after breakfast, had the best of times, and filled their minds with pleasant memories that will last through life.

How to
regard
brothers
and sisters

Companion-
ableness of
a family

YOUR UNCLE WILLIAM.

PICK UP YOUR MANNERS

DEAR SOLON:

When I was about your age it used to be a sort of game among the boys to slip up to a fellow who was not paying much attention and knock off his cap; at the same time saying, "Pick up your manners." I had to pick mine up frequently; but while I put on my cap again I used to think it was the boy that knocked it off who had dropped his manners.

Who
dropped his
manners?

Of course, this custom began with knocking off a man's hat when he ought to have taken it off himself—

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

that is, when he had forgotten or dropped his manners. And maybe the custom among boys comes down from the old English schools, where the younger boys were expected to lift their hats to the upper form fellows, and were reminded of neglect in this unmannerly manner.

Unhappy
survival of
an old
school
custom

I was thinking of this when I saw you the other day take off your cap to a lady you passed. I must say it does me good to see a young boy who can "make his manners" gracefully. It seemed to me that it came easy to you. That is because you are beginning early. But I can remember how awkward I felt at first when I learned that I ought to take off my hat to a lady and began to do my duty in this respect.

Good to see
a boy
make his
manners
gracefully

How many different ways of saluting there are! One boy takes his hat by the crown, lifts it up straight into the air six inches, bows his head ever so little, and then drops the hat back in place. Another takes his hat by the brim and moves it to the right and forward, at the same time tipping the rear end slightly upward. Still another makes a broad sweep with it, bringing it nearly to the ground, so that you are reminded of Casey at the bat when he brushes off the homeplate with his cap. How I used to envy the fellows who could lift their hats easily! I used to think I despised them for being dandies; but, in fact, it was envy I felt because they were graceful.

Ways of
saluting

It will not do to despise manners. Some one has said that good manners spring from a good heart. This is only partly true. I do not see that goodness of heart would prompt you to lift your hat to a lady or to an elderly man. But when you have learned that it pleases the lady or the elderly man to have you show this sign of respect then perhaps it does show a good heart to remember your manners.

Do not
despise
manners

PICK UP YOUR MANNERS

It is entirely different with giving your seat to a lady or an elderly person. In that you are really doing a little kindness, and only thoughtlessness would prevent your doing it. And so some matters of manners have to be learned, while others will spring from a kind heart directly.

I am not going to write a book of etiquette for you, my dear boy, because the publisher doesn't want it and because you wouldn't read it if you knew yourself. I was only going to say that the best books of etiquette go about on two legs, and you have one at home. It is much easier to learn one's manners by imitating some one else than by learning them from a book. And if I were to advise a boy who had not at home a good model in this matter, I would simply tell him to pick out that man or older boy who seemed to him to be the most thorough gentleman and to try to copy his manners. In some things I would rather have a boy try to be himself, to be original; but manners may very properly be copied.

A large field of good manners is covered by the maxim, "Don't be a pig." It seems as though we had all something of the pig in our nature, and we have to be trained out of it. Most of what we call table-manners could be learned by the application of this motto. The unreasoning eagerness, the motions, the noises which are natural to a thoroughbred pig, should be avoided by a well-bred boy. Who was it that replied, when asked in what he preferred to eat his orange, "In a bath-tub"? The instinct of the pig is to get into the trough with both feet.

It is the same piggish instinct that prompts people to rush and tug and push for the best places in cars or at theatres. Of course, one can't be blamed for obeying the invitation, "Come early and avoid the

Springing
from a
kind heart

Example
the best
teacher

Look out
for others

Giving up
a seat

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

rush." But a boy may always be proud to have and use the opportunity to give his place to a lady—and, of course, this means any woman—or to an old man. I think most boys are proud to show that they can stand up alone.

To be helpful and agreeable

In general, I suppose the purpose of manners is to make one's self agreeable. If one were in doubt whether to do or not to do any particular little act he might decide by the test: Is this intended to be helpful or agreeable to others? At least this would apply to the deeper cases of manners. And if any boy hesitates about "picking up his manners," he may ask himself whether he wishes to be helpful and agreeable or not.

Dandy's manners

I think no one really admires a dandy. A dandy is a fellow who is proud of his manners and his clothes—who thinks more of them than he should. I don't blame any boy for not wishing to pass for a dandy. But most boys are not in danger of this, and they can afford to make some effort to "pick up their manners."

YOUR UNCLE WILLIAM.

ON SPORTS

MY DEAR JOE:

One of the best sports

I am glad to see that you have taken to playing golf. Not that I am a golf expert myself; on the contrary. Personally, I am rather cool toward the game, and when I see a man flourish his stick about his head in such a superfluously ornamental way, I feel like General Grant when he said to a man who had missed the ball three times: "Yes, I see; it seems to be fine exercise, but what is the object of the ball?" But I believe in sports of almost all kinds, and golf is one of the best kinds. It is half way between a game and a sport.

Possibly you will not find this distinction in a dic-

ON SPORTS

tionary, but it ought to be there. Riding, walking, swimming, rowing, hunting, fishing—these we commonly call sports, and never games. On the other hand, baseball, football, tennis, are games, although we often call them sports as well. Now what is the difference between the first group of exercises and the second? It is easy to see. In the first set there is no competition. A fellow can walk, row, ride, climb, hunt, and fish by himself, although he may enjoy better having a companion. In the second set a leading point of the performance lies in beating some one; one fellow or one set of fellows is pitted against another to find out which is the master.

Difference
between
sports and
games

Now I am not disposed to condemn games by any means. So long as the rivalry is friendly and both parties—the victors and the vanquished—look at it in the right way, a wholesome out-of-door game may be just as good as a sport, and it certainly gains much zest in the presence of larger numbers and from the desire to win. But perhaps it will help us to look at things in the right way, and to appreciate golf better, if we compare games and sports a little further.

The right
way to
look at
games

In a game somebody must be beaten, since somebody always beats—except in a draw. In a sport this is not necessarily so. Now there is a good side as well as a bad side to being beaten. It is one of the great lessons of life to keep up a cheerful spirit when you have done your best and been beaten. I suppose nobody likes to be beaten. Nobody enters into a contest for the purpose of being beaten. But when one has been beaten in a fair game he can really enjoy it, if he learns how. He can feel: I have done my best, and that is worth while; and I have grown stronger, so that I shall run or throw or bat better next time;

How to en-
joy being
beaten

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

and I have seen a boy who can do better than I can, and I will admire him and learn from him.

And on the other side, if one beats in the contest, he can say: I did my best for this time, but I shall do still better next time; the other fellows did their best, too, and I will respect them and show them how to do better, if I can.

Danger
greatest to
the one
who wins

But really there is more danger for the boy who wins than for the one who is beaten. He is apt to think too much of himself and become "stuck up"; and if he does, he runs the risk of losing the good-will of the other boys. And next to the love of his mother, I suppose a boy cares for nothing so much as the liking of the other boys. I used to play with a fellow who had a mean way of dealing in this respect. If he won, as he commonly did, he used to look very superior and strut ever so little—just enough to be aggravating. And if I won, which happened rarely, then he would look supremely indifferent and say, "Oh, I never care for winning, I only play for the fun of the thing." And I was not cool and thoughtful enough not to be irritated. To tell the truth, I used to get quite wild over his aggravating manner.

To play for
the fun of
the thing

But if one can learn how, that is the way to look at games: to play for the fun of the thing, doing one's best, to be sure, but not chiefly for the sake of winning, and especially not for the sake of crowing over those whom we may defeat.

Risks and
time

There is another point about games. In the competition one is tempted to go too far, either in the time spent, or in the risks taken. It is hard for a boy to see this, for he loves to take risks. And I can't altogether blame a fellow like you, Joe, for enjoying a little danger. Still, we must remember that our legs and our necks belong to mother at home and not just to

ON SPORTS

ourselves. And as to the time spent, that must lie with the conscience of every honest boy. If there are duties at home, or if there is money that must be earned, of course these must come first, and the wise boy will turn these things into some sort of game. But if time is free, and I wish much of it might be for every schoolboy, then there is nothing better than outdoor games and sports, and I should encourage a boy to play or work at them with all his might.

For I like to see a fellow do with all his might whatever he does, even to playing.

One more thing that too often goes with games, and less often with sports; that is, betting. Boys of your age are not so likely to make bets, but you may be tempted to begin, and that is just the best time for stopping. Betting is a bad business habit and it is a bad sportsman's habit. It spoils the true work of either business man or sportsman. As I am going to talk about this again I will not say much now, but only that the high rivalry of games often tempts boys and men to bet, while, in fact, betting is a most unworthy and unsportsmanlike way of showing one's interest in a game.

You often hear this word: sportsmanlike. What I have said about the difference between games and sports shows the true meaning of the word. A true sportsman plays, in the first place, for the pleasure of using his strength and his skill and of growing stronger. A true sportsman never plays for the sake of beating a rival, and hence he is not tempted to resort to dishonest and underhanded tricks. A true sportsman plays fair and is as ready to admire and praise good qualities in a rival as in any one. A true sportsman never bets, because he knows that betting

The evil
of betting

A true
sportsman

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

rouses an unnatural desire to win and tempts players and lookers-on to use unfair means to win.

When
games are
sports

It is easier to be a true sportsman in sports than in games. But if games are played in a sportsmanlike spirit they become sports. That is one of the advantages of golf, that it cultivates a truly sportsmanlike spirit, and so I am glad you are playing it. As for myself, I love almost any game, but tennis best of all.

YOUR UNCLE WILLIAM.

"THE GANG"

MY DEAR JOHN:

Boys by
the name
of John

Did you ever notice that boys by the name of John seem to need more advice than boys with other names, or at least to get more? I can't explain how it is so. Sometimes I used to think that boys named William came in for more than their due share. But probably that has changed since I was a boy.

Motto for
the gang

I noticed you the other day standing with your back against the wall of the schoolhouse and surrounded by a group of boys who were listening attentively to something you were saying. And I said to myself, "Ah, that is John's gang." I have little to say on general principles against gangs. I am sorry for the boy that doesn't belong to one, or perhaps I should say, who isn't a member of one. For with gangs as with political parties the motto should be, "This is my gang," not "I belong to this gang." You don't want to be ashamed of your gang. You want to own up to it and be proud of it if you can. But you don't want to be owned by it.

Pleasures
of the
gang

In my day they hadn't invented the word "gang." They were simply "the boys." But we had our sets just the same; and, oh, the joys of being one of the set! To go swimming together, to go nutting to-

"THE GANG"

gether, to combine forces and finances for a catboat on the river, to gather in the hayloft and tell stories, to skylark up and down the alleys on autumn evenings, shouting, "Blank's Blank's bladder," and a hundred other pleasures known only to a gang of boys!

But there are good gangs and bad gangs. If you are the leader of a gang you can make it a good gang. But if you are not the leader you must look out. There are boys who are poison, and one such boy can poison a gang. If you find yourself in a gang with such a fellow, there are only two things to do—shake him off, or get out yourself.

Poison is
the gang

You know what I mean when I say that a fellow is poison. Not that you simply don't like him, but that you couldn't think of repeating his language and his stories to your mother. It is strange how such stories keep alive and crawl about like snakes and lizards out of sight. In my neighborhood, when I was a boy, was one fellow whose filthy mouth was full of such stories, and who used to take delight in telling them to the younger boys. Most of us were too young to understand how filthy they were. It is a wonder that any of us grew up decent men, so it seems to me now. If I should find that sort of fellow now among a set of young boys such as I was, I should feel like tarring and feathering him and sending him out to live with the hogs in the woods. But perhaps he was an uncommon specimen; at least, I hope so.

A fellow
who is
poison

The leader of a gang has to be a pretty smart boy, and he ought to be a very manly boy. For he has great responsibilities. I wonder whether you ever saw the words "noblesse oblige" and wondered what they mean. They are French, and they mean that a man or boy who is a leader must look out where he

What the
leader of
the gang
must do

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

is going because the others are following him. He might like to jump over a deep and dangerous ditch, but he must first consider whether some one might break his leg or his neck in trying to follow.

"Follow
your
leader"

Sometimes we used to play a game that we called "Follow your leader." The fellow that was "it" tried to do all sorts of hard or foolish things, and as soon as one of the followers failed to do one of the "stumps" he had to drop out, until finally there were left perhaps one or two who could do everything the leader could do; and then one of these became leader. Whether or not you call it "Follow your leader," that is the game that every gang is playing. All the boys are trying to do what the leader does, and the bright and strong boys are trying to become leaders themselves.

Kinds of
fun to keep
clear of

Most of the things that boys call "fun" are wholesome and good. They are noisy and they "cut up" and they do things that many grown-up people call silly; but it is all natural for a boy to want to do. But sometimes the wish to find something new, to "show off," to find a real "stump" for the gang, tempts a boy to do a thing he ought not to do. It is hard to keep clear of all such things. I would like to see a boy who would resolve to *try* to keep from everything rude, and selfish, and cruel, and unmanly, and dishonest, and filthy.

However, I would not be discouraged if he did not always succeed. But at least from the last three of these, and especially the last, I think he might keep clear. So long as a boy is a leader, surely he ought to make up his mind not to lead his gang into any of these things.

Be full of
good
things

The best way to keep clear of bad things is to have your hands and your head full of good things. A leader among boys, like a leader among men, ought to

ON STUDIES

lie awake nights thinking of good things to keep busy with. For a boy, naturally, it is first a question of games. Aside from being first in the games that come along, you can hunt up other new games, which means hunting up old games usually. Get your father or your uncle or your teacher to suggest the games they like best and get them to come out and help you start them.

Of all things the greatest in this line is to get a regular playground and a gymnasium. Here you will find a chance for the gang to hold together and show what it is good for. You may need to go to the school board, or the council, or the men of the town. And that will do you good and do them good. The boys of Boston stood up for their rights in a playground against General Gage. Let the boys of any town resolve to get a playground and a gymnasium by standing together.

Get a
regular
ground or
gymnasium

There are other things the gang would enjoy doing if they once got into the way of them. You might agree to help keep the school grounds clean and in order; or to show the smaller boys how to play; or to make it easy for the new boys when they came in; or to police the playground or even to help the teacher keep order in the schoolroom.

What
the gang
might do

You have no idea, until you try, how much fun there is in getting a lot of boys to do something together. And you've no idea how much they can do if they will try.

YOUR UNCLE WILLIAM.

ON STUDIES

MY DEAR WALDO:

It is undoubtedly true, as you say, that many eminent men and some very respectable scholars have succeeded despite their lack of a regular training.

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

Rebellion
against
studies

And because you are not permitted to have your own way in the choice of studies, you propose to drop out of school and chance it with the exceptional few. Your objection to the requirements of the course as they now face you are that you must study algebra, which you can't make head nor tail of, and that you want to spend your time on the study of butterflies, to which you are devoted.

Algebra
and botany

In a great many points I sympathize with you. My soul used to rebel against the claims that were made for the "axioms" as self-evident truths. This was an insult to my intellect. A few were so self-evident that they were absolutely silly, while others had taken refuge under the cover of "axioms" because they did not dare to face a critical examination. At least it seemed to me so then. I have learned since to respect algebra, but I can never profess to love it.

On the other hand, I had a consuming passion for botany, or at least what in those days passed for botany—the study of plants and flowers. I would tramp five miles to find a new fern, and would gladly have given to botany twice the time I was required to spend on algebra.

Better the
school
course
than none
at all

I am not standing up for the school course as perfect by any means; but I think that it is much better than no course at all for the average boy. It may indeed, be true that you are more than an average boy, but it would not be wise for you to act on that supposition, because the chances are all the other way, and it is too late to correct the mistake if you find out, about the time that you come into competition with other boys for a place in the world, that you were mistaken. In general, the assumption that you are unlike other people is so dangerous and leads to so many painful experiences that I would stop right now and talk to

ON STUDIES

you about it if I had not set out to advise you about your choice of studies.

The comfort that I got out of algebra, and which you or any other boy may get out of any hard and distasteful study or task, was in proving that I could master it, even if it was hard. I said to myself: "It is true, there is no sense nor profit in the axioms and the problems; but I can do them if the next fellow can, and I don't propose to back out." I believe just that sort of determination is the mark of the best English and American character and has made our people the masters of the earth. I wouldn't ask a boy or a man to do nothing but that sort of thing, though sometimes it seems as though men have to. For the use of facing and mastering tough tasks in school is the training it gives us for doing the same sort of thing in life outside. And in life outside there is no question of the fact that we have to meet and master problems and obstacles that we don't at all like.

But so long as you can have at least some subjects of study that you enjoy for themselves, you ought to learn to enjoy some others just for the sake of proving your powers. I know they say that every study is full of difficulties and that you will find obstacles enough everywhere. But if you give up because you dislike algebra, I fear that you may want to back out when you come to the place in entomology (that's the college word for butterflies), where they expect you to spend three hours a day counting the minute feathers on the butterfly's wing with your eye glued to the objective of a compound microscope. I know you think you will never get tired of butterflies and that you will submit to any amount of drudgery for their sake. And it certainly is a long cry from algebra to butterflies. All the same, you can't yet expect to do,

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

or have to do, only the things that you like. Even a man can't do that. To be sure, a man can often choose, and has to choose, and can't afford to do things just for the fun of it. But a boy ought to do some things just to prove that he can.

But try
to do
the things
you like

But while I wouldn't agree to your backing down in the face of algebra, any more than if algebra were an enemy's battery, I am with you for studying butterflies, or anything else that you like. I do believe in a boy's finding out what he likes to do and having a chance to do it. I never knew a boy yet who couldn't find a little extra time for something that he really wanted to do. I would make up my mind to know as much as possible about butterflies, and in time to know all there is to know about some one variety. That is what makes men great scholars, or what they call authorities. But it is also what makes men successes in any line. And whether you stick to butterflies or go into business, or whatever you are to do afterward, it will help you to have mastered the subject of butterflies or any other subject.

When men
are "au-
thorities"

How to
master a
subject

So I would go or write to the person who seemed to know most on the subject and ask what books to begin with and how to work systematically. For it is very important to take up a study by the right end, just as it is with a tool or a poker. If you can not buy the books you can probably borrow them if you will take good care of them. But I would make up my mind to buy my own books as soon as possible. And you must begin to draw and take notes, for in these days few if any scholars can keep all their knowledge in their heads. Paper is cheap, therefore use plenty of paper; have it all of one size, so that it can be pinned or bound together; have separate sheets for each separate point, and be sure to put at the head

ON TEACHERS

or in the margin what it is about. In this way you will save yourself much time as you go on.

Get your friends interested in your study. You can usually find some others with tastes like yours, ^{Interest your friends in your study} and if one cares more for flowers and another for beetles and another for birds, you can go to the woods together and enjoy your expeditions, and sometimes give one another pointers about where things are to be found.

And if it were history, or government, or anything else that you were interested in, I would tell you just about the same thing. Only it seems to me more natural for boys of your age to be interested in butterflies. But the general rule I have been trying to give you is good for any stage and any age. Don't be balked by algebra. Take your medicine, so long as it is not poison. You can't always have your "druther." You will enjoy butterflies better after mastering square-root. ^{The general rule}

YOUR UNCLE WILLIAM.

ON TEACHERS

MY DEAR JOHN:

I couldn't help laughing when you told me of your trials with your teacher and took him off so well. And it certainly was comical to think of the man regarding himself as besieged in the schoolhouse by a bunch of ^{A timorous teacher} twelve-year-olds like you and "the kids." Especially when you really didn't intend to hurt him, as you assured me. "Aw, we wouldn't 'a done nothin' to 'im." But after all, John, it wasn't quite right for me to laugh, just as it wasn't quite right for you to tease the teacher. You know I am a teacher myself, John; and, like you, I have to stand up for "de gang." But, unlike some teachers—and I fear yours is one of them—I was a boy once, too, and I can't entirely get over it.

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

What a
boy likes

And so I am sure you will let me tell you a few things about teachers which may help you in managing them as you go on. For, of course, I recognize that a boy can not be a lamb and be led by a ribbon. He is more like a pig or a young calf, which always want to go in the opposite direction if you try to pull them along by the neck. A boy loves to wrestle (that is the book word for "rastle"); he has to find out what things are like and what he himself is good for, and so he challenges everybody and everything he meets to wrestle or fight with him—not out of malice, but to find out who is the better man.

Teachers
are human
beings in
difficult
positions

Now the gist of what I want to tell you, John, is that teachers are human beings, so to speak. I know they do not always act as though they were, but I can assure you, from long acquaintance with a great many of them, that they are all human. This being so, it follows that they are imperfect and have weaknesses. Most of them would admit this. It is a waste of time to test them in order to prove it. Along with these natural imperfections they are placed in a very difficult position in being required to sit on a platform and be looked at and watched by a lot of keen-eyed children. It is very hard to be natural and simple under such circumstances. If you doubt it, ask the teacher to let you try it for a quarter of an hour. Or perhaps he has given you the chance without your asking. If so, you know that it is unpleasant enough.

Teasing a
fellow not
your size

Now it used to be the rule among boys, "Take a fellow of your size!" And I guess that will always be considered the fair rule among boys. It ought to be the rule among men, too. Did it ever occur to you that in teasing the teacher you are picking on a fellow who is not your size? Actually, though, in a match at making faces, or snickering, or shuffling

ON TEACHERS

feet, you have him at a mean disadvantage. There are fifty of you and only one of him. I used to hear a great braggart say: "I can lick you with both hands tied behind me." You have the teacher almost in that condition. He has to be thinking about the lessons, and the ringing of the bells, and of keeping the windows open just enough and not too much, and of whether that little boy in the third row hasn't the measles, and of how to keep the boys from fighting at recess, and of how to make that dull girl in front of him understand what a subtrahend is, and a hundred other things. In this way his hands are almost tied behind him. And so it isn't quite fair play to challenge him to try to catch you rolling marbles across the floor while you seem to sit looking attentively into your geography.

With
hands tied
behind

If you will consider how many things he has to do, or to try to do, you will perhaps not wonder that he loses his head sometimes and imagines that all the boys are banded together against him. Really he needs your pity.

The great point in managing a teacher is to learn to get at the human side of him. If you will remember that he really is a human being and in need of help, that is a good beginning. Of course, you don't want to become the teacher's pet. No boy does. But you might agree with the other boys to try to "bring him out."

Get at
the human
side
of the
teacher

There are two things I would advise you to try. One is to get him out on the playground to play games with you. I believe he will accept if you invite him. If he isn't up on your games you can teach him. Let him see how it feels to be learning from the boys. Or perhaps you can get him to show you how they played some game when he was a boy.

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

That is really the key to the whole matter: "When he was a boy."

Get him
to talk
of his
boyhood

The second thing I propose is of the same kind: Get him to agree to tell you about his boyhood—his adventures, his games, and his school days. In time I believe you will come to believe that he is human, and you will find that he understands you better and you understand him.

If your teacher were a woman—well, you are less likely to have trouble with her, anyway. And if you do, the same thoughts may help. You could ask her to tell about her brothers, if she has any, or about the boys in the school she attended, or about the first school she taught.

Learn
from him
all he
can teach

One more point. Aside from this trying of your teacher to see what he is made of, you should not forget that he really knows some things that you need to know in order to get ahead in school and in life. No matter how unreasonable he may seem to be, and how much he may tempt you to cut up, I wouldn't let this prevent me from getting out of him all I could. I would make up my mind that I was going to get all the good out of him I could, and not to let his unlikable ways interfere with my coming out near the front in school. If you spend your time in teasing him, instead of learning what you can from him, you are doing what the old saw calls "cutting off your nose to spite your own face."

Don't cut
off your
nose to
spite your
face

But after all, if you will look at him as a human being, give him a fair chance, and try to "bring him out" as merely an old boy, I believe that things will go better in school.

YOUR UNCLE WILLIAM.

ON THE READING OF BOOKS

ON THE READING OF BOOKS

MY DEAR EWING:

You are beginning to think that you ought to be able to decide for yourself what to read, and to wonder why you find it hard to get interested in some of the books that your father and I have given you. Now to have learned to like a few really good books is worth more than many pages of advice. And yet there are such great differences in books, and such different qualities in one and the same book, that a fellow feels as though he wanted some rule to go by.

Rule for
really good
books

If one could have enough company with people of many different sorts, and could travel all he would like to, he wouldn't need to read many books. Many strong and noble men have gotten along well through life with very few books, for you remember that printed books have been known but four and a half centuries. Formerly it was enough for a good and useful man to know simply his own district or country, but now that the whole world has come to be like one province every one feels that he must know considerable about the whole world. And as few of us can travel over the entire earth and meet all the strange and interesting people we would like to meet, we must get our knowledge from books.

Why we
must get
knowledge
from books

Books are not an end in themselves, but simply a substitute for direct intercourse with men and the world. And this fact gives us a key to the question of what we should read. In one way or another books are supposed to represent life. If they do not represent life truly or well, they are misleading, and in so far ought to be avoided. Now the chief judge of faithfulness in the representation of life must be experience, and only those who have had the widest

Books rep-
resent life

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

experience are qualified to say in a given case whether a picture is true to life, or they are qualified in proportion to their experience. Here young people must depend largely on older people.

But life is very large and varied, and there are books for every side and phase of it. Here it becomes necessary to choose what part of life you want most to know about and to become familiar with. For you will soon learn, if you have not learned already, that you can not expect to know everything and everybody. And in choosing your books, I think you may safely go upon the same principles or the same instincts that lead you to prefer the society of people and to seek certain occupations and amusements. As a rule nothing can be good for you in books that would not be good for you in real life. Only in the proportions we need not follow the same course in our reading as in our living.

For instance, we have both occupations and amusements. In real life the proportion of amusement to steady occupation must be small. But we all agree that boys may have a larger share of mere amusement than grown people. And so it is natural and proper that boys should read more about sports and hunting and travel and adventure than grown people can afford to. For the same reason grown men who work very long and very hard and have little time for relaxation often prefer for their reading exciting tales of adventure as a sort of substitute for the real sports which they have not time for. Or it may be that they choose instead the theatre, which gives them the same sort of relaxation without the labor of reading. It was thus that President Lincoln sought the relaxation of the theatre in the midst of the tremendous strain of the Civil War.

What part
of life
you want
to know

Nothing
good in
books that
is not
good in
real life

Kinds of
books a
boy should
read

ON THE READING OF BOOKS

As compared with real life, a book is usually very condensed. In one story of animal life, which you can read in a day, the naturalist gives you the result of his study and travel for many years. The adventures in the story which you read in one afternoon took in reality months or years. This is one of the great advantages of books, that they save us time. In some large measure, if we read thoughtfully, we get the benefit in a week of what it required the author many months to live or think.

The advantage of books

But there is a danger in condensed food and in condensed books as well. We are not to eat too rapidly or too much at a time. It is so with books. If we read them too freely and too rapidly we are apt to become dissatisfied with real life because it is not so filled with adventure as a book can be. It is this sort of indigestion, due to overeating of condensed pictures of life in books, that leads boys sometimes to run away from home in the expectation of finding a more exciting life somewhere else. They learn, as we all learn, with much suffering, that the richest piece of life in the world is the one where we have lived the longest.

Danger in reading too freely

All books and all things printed are in some way pictures of life. Newspapers are like crowds. Most of us enjoy a crowd for a short time, and find something stirring and enjoyable in it. But few of us care to stay long in a crowd. We know that we can not think well nor be our very selves in a crowd. It is somewhat thus with the reading of newspapers. A brief touch with the crowded interests of life shown in them may entertain and enliven us. But too much reading of newspapers would be like spending a great deal of time in a crowd. We should become confused and distracted.

Newspapers like crowds

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

Patience
in read-
ing valued
books

We do not always "take to" a person at first sight, whom afterward we come to love and value very highly. It is so with books. And this fact ought to make us resolve to have some patience with books that do not interest us at first trial or by their opening chapters. When a book has been a good friend of a great many good people for a great many years, it is pretty fair evidence that the book is worth getting acquainted with. And while I would not urge you to say you like a book just because other people say they like it, but on the contrary would advise you to say frankly to your best friends just what you think of a book and why you do not like it, if you don't; still I do think that you ought to try several times at least to like a book that the wisest and best people have liked. Of course this is making due allowances for difference in age. Sometimes I think your own friends are not wise in urging you to read and telling you that you must like a book which is really meant for older people.

Judge
books as
you judge
people

I might tell you a great many things about choosing your book companions, but I can save much of the time by asking you to remember that books are people, and that as a rule you should judge books as you should people. Don't associate with a book in private that you would not like to take into company. Don't become familiar with people in books whom you could not visit with your sister or your father.

The com-
fort and
delight of
poetry

I remember your telling me that you could see no sense in poetry. Now I would give a great deal if I could get you interested in poetry, for some of the greatest and noblest people in the world have kept themselves alive for us in the poems which they wrote. And vast numbers of people have found comfort and delight in these poems. If the language of poetry

ON THE READING OF BOOKS

seems unnatural to you, consider that such language is to be thought something like a uniform or a strange foreign garb on a person. It makes the thought conspicuous and we remember it longer, just as the uniform attracts our notice and remains in our memory. Thoughts in a poem march in rank and file and to music, like a company of soldiers. Some people dislike uniforms and showy dresses, but most people are fond of them. And if one can only learn to like poetry it is a pure and fine pleasure that grows with time and costs very little to supply.

If I can persuade you to like poetry, when you don't, I shall be glad. And while I have not undertaken to tell you what books to read in other lines, A suggestion about poetry because there are so many good ones that I could not name them all, I will give you one suggestion here. If you have any friend who is fond of poetry, ask him, or her, to read aloud to you the best story-poem that he knows. Poetry is meant to be spoken or read aloud. And if you can not have the pleasure of being read to, but must decide for yourself, begin with Macaulay's "Battle of Ivry" or "Horatius," and then take How to begin the reading Scott's "Marmion" or "The Lay of the Last Minstrel." I never knew a boy who was not interested in "Marmion" when he once had made a fair start. If you can not find some one to read to you, suppose you try to get some one to listen to you while you read! You might begin on your mother while she is mending your stockings.

It is a great gift to be able to read aloud well, and practice makes perfect in this as in other things. To read aloud well You might find it a good idea to read some of your other books aloud with your boy friends, taking turns. And if you stop to talk about what you are reading it will do you no harm.

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

I hope I have not given you more advice than you can hold at one time. YOUR UNCLE WILLIAM.

DON'T BE A MULE

MY DEAR FRANK:

Which
side to
go to bat

There is little doubt in my mind that your nine has the right of it in the matter of which side was to go to bat. But it seems that the captain of the other nine thinks that his side had the better claim, or at least he acts as though he did. And so the question is: Whether to stand upon our rights or to refuse to play? I understand that John Harris says, "Pooh! pooh! this is all boys' play!" and doesn't condescend to give you his opinion.

Boys' play
and men's
play alike

Now I can't look at it in that way. Boys' play and men's play seem a great deal alike to me. You have heard an old saying, "The child's the father of the man"? I have watched men in their contests in business and politics, and they act very much like boys at play. Your question about which side shall go first to bat is not very different from the question, which "crowd" has a right to name the candidate for governor. The way in which you settle this baseball question is the way in which you will settle the question whether to let Jones in on the ground floor in the "sugar deal," or whether to support Newton in the Third Ward.

Standing
up for
one's
rights

You say something, Frank, about "standing up for your rights," and you refer to an eminent man who is said to have said, "I would rather be right than be President." Now here is a case, my dear fellow, where we must be clear in our thought. Are you sure that "right" and "rights" in these two expressions mean just the same thing? Both of these sentiments have a good sound. Both of them appeal to us, I am

DON'T BE A MULE

sure. I admit that they do to me. Isn't "standing up for one's rights" almost the watchword of the English people?—and that means of the American people, too. The first great act of the English nation, almost, was the setting up of a bill of rights, called Magna Charta, at Runnymede, and they stood up for them. And even the boys of English stock have done the same thing if we may believe that fine story about the Boston boys and their protest against the annoyances of General Gage's troops.

But there is a difference between "being right" and the rights that one stands up for, don't you think so? For instance, Shylock—I am sure you know his story—had a right to his pound of flesh, and he stood up for it, but that did not make his course of action right. One has a right, I suppose, to whatever he has paid for or has been promised. But it may not be the right thing for him to insist upon these claims under any or all circumstances.

There are three ways of making claims. One fellow claims all he can get. This is the theory on which the hog acts. In the relations of men and nations it has been expressed in the phrase, "Might makes right." I do not believe in that. I know you don't. I never knew many boys who believed in that doctrine.

Another fellow claims all he has a right to, that is, all that has been given him or promised him, or perhaps all that anybody else like him gets, or is likely to get. He says, "I am as good as anybody; I have a right to the best there is." If he sees some one in better clothes than himself, or eating better food than he has, he feels wronged, and says to himself or aloud, "I have a right to that." And if he will earn it, we all concede his right.

Finally a man may say, "I will claim, not all I can

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

What it
is best one
should
have

get, nor all I have earned, but only what it is best for me and everybody that I should have." Instead of feeling that he is wronged whenever any one has something better than he himself has, he may come to the point of feeling that something is wrong if anybody is not as well off as he himself is. And if he were a complete Christian he would not rest happy in having anything that others needed and had not. But, in any case, he may be a very common philosopher and good citizen by going on the principle: I will claim only what it is best for all concerned that I should have.

Not let-
ting one's
self be
run over

But I did not start out for a talk on rights, but only on standing up for them. I wouldn't advise any friend of mine to make a practice of letting himself be run over. I don't like a boy who has no spirit. But neither do I like to see a boy always going about with a chip on his shoulder. The fact is, we ought to ask in this matter as in all others, Is it worth while? We must try to keep in mind the end we are after. We must ask sometimes, Is the game worth the candle? In a word, we must use common-sense.

Using com-
mon-sense

For instance, in the matter of this game: I suppose the boys all want to play the game. That is the object. It isn't a matter of life and death which side goes to bat first, nor which side has a right to do so under the agreement. The important thing is, to have the game and to play the best ball you can. Under such conditions when a man stands up for his rights very stiffly we generally understand that he distrusts himself or his powers in the game proper, and is hunting for a way to get out of playing.

And, Frank! I heard you tell one of the boys that you couldn't back out—that is, give up your claim to play at bat first. I remember well enough how hard

DON'T BE A MULE

it is to "back down." But it is one of the great things to learn. The man who says, "I never change my mind" is usually a man who hasn't any mind to change. The ability to back down is one of the chief differences between a well-trained horse and a raw mule. The mule has many good qualities. But I wouldn't choose him for my model.

Don't be a mule, or even a balky horse. Did you ever see a horse stop in the middle of the road and refuse to budge? He has made up his mind that he has been wronged some way, and that it will compromise his dignity to move on. You cluck; you say appealingly, "Come, Dick!" you shake the lines gently and push on them a little; you twirl the whiplash suggestively within the field of his right eye—he wears no blinders; you finally get out and pat him and then take him by the bit and pull gently, and then harder and still harder. All in vain; the hard look in his eye grows flintier still. Then you get into the wagon while your own teeth begin to set tight together. Still you give him only a gentle tap at first; in vain. Then you give him a smart cut; in vain. You try one shoulder and then the other; you give a sharp volley. Then you are seized with shame and remorse, and you get out to examine the harness to find the place where it is cutting him. You find nothing wrong. And by this time the neighbors have gathered round you with advice. Twist his tail; tie up his front leg; blindfold him; put peas in his ear; talk kindly to him; push the wagon upon him. You try them all; in vain. Finally you decide to leave him where he stands until he tires out. This will be a good time for memorizing those fifty lines of "Julius Caesar." Before you have finished, your horse will have ceased to be a mule and will be ready to move on.

Learning
to back
down

A balky
horse

Tire him
out

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

If it involves something great, stick to your position

A boy ought to have more sense than a mule. "A wise man sometimes changes his mind; a fool never." If your mind is set on something great and worth while, stick to your position. But learn to ask and see whether it is worth while. What a man may have to say about politics may not be worth while, and often he had better not insist on saying it. But if any one denies his right to say what he thinks or tries to prevent him, then the important right of free speech is attacked, and it is worth while to stand up for that. But notice that in this case he is standing up for a right of everybody else also, and that makes a great difference.

In most cases of standing up for our rights we are simply insisting on having our own way. And that is not worth while unless life or property is involved. If I were you I would go ahead with the game. The only difference between firmness and stubbornness is the difference between me and you.

YOUR UNCLE WILLIAM.

ANIMALS AS FRIENDS

MY DEAR CLINTON:

The boy who loves animals

When you hinted the other day that you would be happy if you had a dog like my Laddie I knew that you were the right kind of boy. "The merciful man is merciful to his beast" is only a part of the story. The man who likes animals, or the boy who loves them, has some of the best traits of friendship in his heart. A boy who can make a good friend of a dog can also be a good friend to other boys and other men. On the other hand, it seems to me that there is something quite lacking in a person who does not like animals of some sort. I mean really like them, not simply admire them or make a display of them. There

ANIMALS AS FRIENDS

are men of cruel heart who like to own and drive fine horses, but it is for the sake of display and their own pleasure, not because they love the horses.

The highest test of a boy or a man is his disposition to love something. Really if he can love one person or one animal I know that he can love others, and so I am pleased when I see you or any other boy on good terms with a dog or a horse. I do not agree with that cynical person who said: "The more I see of men the more I think of dogs." I agree with the compliment to dogs, but not with the slur upon men. And yet, it is true, that it is easier to get at the heart of a dog, and his good qualities are more easily seen than in the case of most men. The good qualities of a dog are often a reproach to a man. For the dog is more consistent, less changeable than man as a rule. This is, I suppose, because dog nature is simpler than human nature. The dog hasn't so many things to think about; he doesn't have to worry about managing the world as we do.

To love something the highest test of a boy

Every living thing is interesting, and one can even become attached to some of the humblest of animals and draw from them signs of recognition and fondness. All animals have some measure of intelligence, and there is no more delightful occupation than studying the evidences of this intelligence in animals, high or low. Some writers will tell you of the great difference between instinct and intelligence, but be slow how you accept what they tell you in this matter. The marvelous methods and foresight of ants and bees are such that I can not speak slightly of them. How do we know that they are less intelligent than we when they act so as to bring about such perfect results?

The intelligence of the humblest animals

But while spiders—do you know the story of Pa-

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

Affection
in the
higher
animals

ganini's spider?—and snakes and lizards and other animals learn to recognize one who cares for them, it is only a few of the very highest animals that seem capable of appreciating and returning human affection—the cat, the horse, some birds, and especially the dog. The dog has the most character, is most human. To be sure every animal may display some one trait that suggests human nature: the hog is a hog, the ox is slow and awkward, the monkey is a mimic, the ant is industrious, and so on; but only the dog has some of the qualities which seem to belong especially to man.

To own
a dog
the best
way to
know him

But the best way to become acquainted with a dog is to get one and play with him and train him. There seems to be almost no limit to what you can teach a good dog. In general, what is called a well-bred dog is better than a mongrel or dog of mixed stock. Yet here, as with men, a thoroughbred is sometimes a weakling and a scrub, while the dog of no family or pedigree at all may have some of the finest traits. But as a rule it is best to get a dog of a certain breed and one of the best of his breed. At least he can be taught more easily, and the chances are in his favor.

Story of
a dog

As a boy I had a noble friend who was a mixture of mastiff and coach-dog. He was a dog of the highest character, the friend of every decent boy in the neighborhood. I can not begin to tell you all about him, but one incident I must mention. My brother and I carried newspapers—an early morning paper. Lion went sometimes with one of us and sometimes with the other until he knew our routes as well as we did. When he wanted to go from one of us to the other on our morning trips he would go to some point on the route of the one whom he wanted to join, get up on his hind legs and look into the box to see whether the

ANIMALS AS FRIENDS

paper was there, and then go forward on the route if he found it, or backward if he did not. He was seen to do this several times by different people. Do you wonder that I smile when people deny that a dog has reason?

I think that a dog brings out, or appeals to, the best that is in a man. Have you ever read "Bob, Son of Battle"? That is the greatest dog book, in my opinion. And it is just because it shows the dog in most intimate companionship with men, and shows even the effect of their character on each other. It is an old but very common observation: Adam Mac-Adam, mean as he is, can not be entirely bad so long as a faithful dog stands by him and he stands by the dog. And he isn't entirely bad. No man is. And perhaps if some men had been able to show to him the same qualities that Red Wullie, his dog, showed him, he might have been a better and a happier man. Every Rip Van Winkle has a Schneider.

Faithfulness and a forgiving spirit are two of the finest qualities in men, and they are the chiefest qualities of dogs. No dog is naturally quarrelsome. Only a few are made so by continued harrying and bad treatment. Your dog is not forever taking offence; he does not know what a slight is; he never believes that you meant to hurt him or could possibly forget him. He licks your hand after you have struck him and shames you if you have struck in anger; he welcomes you home after days or weeks or months of absence; he sympathizes with you when you are sick, and will break his heart for you if you die.

There is no better companion for a boy than a good dog. He stays by you through thick and thin. If you want to go walking he is always ready, or if you have to stay indoors he will stay with you. He will

The dog
in inti-
mate com-
panionship
with men

Faithful-
ness and
forgiv-
ingness
in dogs

No bet-
ter com-
panion for
a boy

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

walk with you by the hour and not disturb you, or if you wish he will run and play with you. He rewards all your efforts to teach him, and at the same time teaches you patience and many other good things. You will never learn from him any bad habits. When you are with him your mother has no need to worry about your company. He will not desert you for the new boy who moves into the house across the street. He will not teach you to be quarrelsome, but he will fight for you to the death.

How the
dog has
grown in
character

The dog has grown in character since we first hear of him in history and literature. In the Bible the dog is a symbol only for what is contemptible and mean. To-day he is the type of fidelity. That this change has come to the dog through his association with man is a credit to them both. Do you know what the word "cynic" means? It is applied to one who has no faith in men. And it is a curious fact that this word comes from a Greek word that means dog. It is a slander on the dog. Of all creatures the one that has the most unquestioning faith in man is the dog. The cynic is most undoglike. But this is another proof that the character of dogs has been improving. That ought to be encouraging for the rest of us.

The more
you treat
a dog
like a
man, the
better dog
he is

Of course, there are some troubles connected with keeping a dog, as there are about everything else that is good. But the pleasure and comfort and improvement that come from a dog's company will more than repay all the trouble. In general, the more you treat a dog like a man the better dog he will be. Almost any kind of dog is interesting and has the good traits of his kind. Still, I am sorry to see ugly dogs encouraged when there are so many beautiful kinds that are as good or better. I don't like to say a word against

ON PLAYING KEEPS

any dog, but why should any one take up with such an ugly creature as a pug or a bulldog when there are such beautiful creatures as collies and spaniels and setters and terriers in existence? On the whole, the collie seems to me to be the prince of dogs, and I am very glad that you are to have one of that kind.

There are a great many good things that can be said for a horse and his friendship and association, and if a boy is fortunate enough to have both a good horse and a good dog he ought to be happy. But most boys can not afford the horse. Then let us be thankful for the excellent friendship of the dog.

The boy
with a
dog and
a horse

YOUR UNCLE WILLIAM.

ON PLAYING KEEPS

MY DEAR WILL:

You seemed to be taking an interest in what I was saying to Joe about "Sports," and especially in the subject of betting. And now you have asked me to explain the matter to you and to tell you why betting is not right. Let me own up to you that it is not an easy thing to explain. The reason why betting should be kept away from games and sports is plain: it adds a false interest to the game and makes those who have staked money want the side to win on which they have made their stakes, instead of being glad to have the best player win. And with money at stake, which means a possible loss, men will often do unfair and dishonorable things to make their side win, or at least secure the decision, whether they deserved it or not.

Why
betting
should be
kept from
games and
sports

But what you mean is betting all by itself. Why is betting wrong? Now here are three ways in which you may get money without being dishonest, or perhaps four. It may be given to you; and in that case

Ways of
getting
money

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

Gift,
earning,
prize

the one who gives the money loses it, but he is willing to lose it. It may not be good for you to have money given to you, but if a man gives it to you there is no wrong done to him. Or you may earn it. In that case some one else simply trades you money for your work. He wants the work more than he does the money, and you want the money more than you want to be idle or to work for yourself, and so you agree to trade, and both sides are satisfied. Or, again, you may get something as a prize. A prize is offered for the swiftest runner or for the best composition. You and many others run or write, as the case may be, and you win. You receive the prize, and the one who has offered it has received the satisfaction of seeing the contest and of having you all do your best. The others may be disappointed, but they have not lost anything. Your gain was not their loss. In fact, they have gained the benefit of the practice. Still there is sometimes disappointment for those who do not win, and we often refer to them as the losers.

Betting

Finally there is betting. You are looking on at the game, and you say to Joe: I'll bet you a quarter that the Reds will win. And Joe says: I bet the Blues will win. You have simply said: I will give you a quarter if the Blues win, provided you give me a quarter if the Reds win. The Reds win; Joe has to give you a quarter. Joe was not ready to give you a quarter for love. You have not earned the quarter; you have not won it as a prize. You have gotten something for nothing, and the one from whom you got it did not want to give it to you. To be sure, he agreed beforehand to do so in case the Reds won. But the fact remains: You have gotten a quarter from your friend which he did not want you to have. He did not give it to you; he lost it. You could not win with-

ON PLAYING KEEPS

out his losing. In this way it is different from a prize that you win in the race.

So there are two bad points about betting: getting something for nothing, which is not good for the winner, and getting something at the expense of another, which is good for neither winner nor loser. These are also two of the chief evils of stealing.

Two bad
points
about
betting

When I was a boy we could play marbles in three ways. There were various games in which the whole interest lay in doing the best shooting. Then again each player kept all the marbles he knocked out of the ring until the other player had none left, when he returned them. This we called "Funny Keeps." And finally, playing in the same way, the player kept all the marbles he knocked out. This was real "Keeps." In my day "Keeps" was regarded as a bad game, and the boys who played it were exceptions and hardly admitted to be respectable. "Funny Keeps" was played by that large class of boys who like to see how close they can come to danger without being hurt, while not a few boys played simple "Marbles" with no "Keeps" about it. To-day, as far as I can learn, all games of marbles are "for keeps." You were actually surprised when I told you that I didn't approve of "Keeps," and you wanted to know why.

"Funny
keeps" and
"keeps"

And this seems to show a general change of opinion in late years, or at least a change of practice, regarding games of chance. I would not be surprised if the game of "Keeps" had largely been the cause of this. For it is not quite so clearly betting as when you bet money on a game played by other people. It is a good deal like playing for a prize. Suppose I set down a fine "agate" and offer to give it to the one who hits it the first shot. The owner—that is, myself—willingly gives it up. And the one who hits it wins

Games
of chance

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

A good
deal like
playing
for a
prize

by his skill. But if the first player hits it, and the first shot is settled by "lagging," there is a little chance in it after all. If I offer an "agate" to whoever hits it, and both hit it, then, of course, it is merely a prize for skill, and equal skill gets equal reward. Next, suppose I put in the marbles all myself and offer to shoot with you, each player to get what he knocks out. That goes a little further. I offer them to you if you can shoot better than I can; but I reserve a chance of keeping them. Finally, we each put in an equal number. We may be equally skilful or equally lucky, and then we keep our own. Or if you are more skilful, you keep your own and win mine. While in straight betting, if you win, you get all of my stake, and not by any skill or effort on your part, but by being a better guesser, or by sheer luck.

"Keeps"
and whist
for stakes

The sober
judgment
of the
wisest

You see how easily one thing shades off into another. I can't blame a boy for playing "Keeps" when his mother plays whist for stakes or even for prizes. Neither can she. Let us be frank about it. The wrong here is not chiefly a wrong of the heart. It is very natural to like to show one's skill and develop one's strength in competition, though a tender heart will never forget the possible disappointment of the defeated. But we do not enter into such competitions with malice, and we add the stakes to increase the zest. No, the wrong in games of chance has been declared such by the head. After carefully watching the results and the effects on character, the sober judgment of the wisest men has come to the conclusion that these results are bad. And so we must learn to regard the games as bad, though we may not at first see where the evil lies. Like a number of things in grown men's business, they are condemned because, as they say, they are "contrary to public pol-

ON GETTING SOMETHING TO DO

icy." That is a hard thing for a boy to understand, but it means just what I have been saying to you: sober, long-sighted judgment sees that they are bad, while quick, offhand judgment sees no wrong in them.

And now for "Keeps." In any matter, if the wrong is hard to see anyway, and then we are thinking of doing only a little of it, or going only a little way, it is still harder to see the wrong. So it is with "Keeps" and with playing for very small stakes, as in whist and in "craps." For this very reason it is better to keep away from such games altogether. They lead us by little and little into the practices which are plainly harmful to us and all the world, such as professional gambling and gambling in "stocks." The short of it is, my dear boy, that "Keeps" is gambling, and that gambling is wrong because it encourages people in trying to get something for nothing, and in profiting by the losses of others.

YOUR UNCLE WILLIAM.

ON GETTING SOMETHING TO DO

MY DEAR WALTER:

I happened the other day to hear you say that you were going to leave school and go to work because you had a chance to earn fifty cents a day. You haven't quite finished your grammar school course yet, but you are so fearful that you may not find anything to do later, if you wait, that you were eager to take this.

Of course, you did not mean that you could not find enough to do in school, nor that you really were doing nothing there. You merely do not think of your studies as "anything to do." I want to advise

Better
to keep
away from
such
games al-
together

They
lead to
gambling

The boy
anxious
to leave
school
and do
something

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

You not to leave school, and one of the first things I want to impress on you is that going to school, if you are earnest about it, is really doing something, quite as much as clerking in a bakery.

Going to
school is
a long-time
investment

You do not think that you are really doing anything unless you are earning money, or being paid money by the day or the week. Here is your first mistake. If you can understand that by going to school you are making yourself better able to do something and perhaps earn more money a few years later, can you not see that doing this is a good deal like waiting for your pay? A man who is paid by the year, instead of by the week or by the day, is doing something quite as much as the one who is paid by the day, isn't he? Indeed, the longer men wait for their pay, as a rule, the more they are paid. People who undertake great enterprises often have to wait several years for their returns. In going to school you are simply making what is called a long-time investment. You must wait several years for your pay. But there is scarcely any investment which is so sure to bring the reward in good time.

Youthful
greed to
earn
money

You can understand that, I am sure. But the trouble with you is, you want to be earning money right away. You want to feel money in your pocket; to have a little money to do what you please with; to get a start in business. You have a fear that if you do not start in now there may not be a place when you are through school. And it seems to you best to take what you are sure of.

Lack of
employ-
ment rare

In point of fact, Walter, no one who can do anything and is willing to do it ever suffers much for lack of employment. Notice, I do not say that such a person never suffers, for this is not true. Very willing and useful people sometimes fail to find a chance to

ON GETTING SOMETHING TO DO

do the thing they want to do or the thing they are best fitted to do. And as a result they sometimes suffer hardship together with those belonging to them. And oftentimes a person is willing to work, but lacks the physical strength, or can do nothing that anybody else wants done. And then again he and his family suffer.

But so long as it is only fear that the place will escape you forever, and that there may be nothing left to be done when you are through school, do not give up your school on that account. Every year there is more to be done, and the person who is able and willing never has to wait long for something to do.

Able and willing, I say. To be able you must be well and strong, or just as well and strong as possible, and you must know how to do something. Well and strong is the first point of all, and one that you have to keep in mind all the while. Even when you have found a good place to work in you have to keep well and strong. And so one of the first of all things for you to look after if you want to have something to do in the world is to keep well and strong. I haven't time to give you a long lecture on the side. But you know that you must live right and not waste your strength in any way if you mean to keep well and strong. Do not be downcast because you are not so well and strong as somebody else. Nobody is perfectly well and strong. All you have to see to is that you keep yourself as well and strong as it is possible for you to be.

And you must know how to do something. In fact, you ought to know how to do several things. And being an average American boy you surely do. It is one of the great points of advantage of the Yankee, as the people of Europe used to call us all

Every year
more to
be done

To keep
well and
strong

Handiness
of the
Americans

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

in America, that he can turn his hand to a number of things, that he is a "handy" man. Now here comes the place for some real good advice.

The call
to one
thing

A very few people in this world feel sure, even when they are as young as you and younger, that they were born to do some one certain thing and nothing else. And such people can wisely begin very early to prepare for that particular thing. But not seldom it happens that they are mistaken. They are convinced that they were born to be President, and in fact they are made to drive mules, though perhaps the qualifications are not unlike. They believe that they are called to preach, when in fact their gift is in making soap. Or perhaps they have the gift they think they have and spend years in cultivating it, and then it turns out that the world where they live has no use for that gift. In either case it would be better if they had learned to do more than one thing, even if they devoted most of their time to the work they felt themselves born to do.

No decided
bent

A larger number of people change their minds several times about their calling. At fifteen a boy wants to be a locomotive engineer, at nineteen he thinks of becoming a lawyer, at twenty-five he goes into the packing-house work. Some men never seem to find out what they are especially made for. They change employment every other year their life long and are never satisfied. On the other hand, some men change their work often and seem to succeed at whatever they undertake. Yet it is true in general that we do best in that line for which we have prepared ourselves and in which we have had the longest experience.

Still again, some boys do not seem to have any decided call toward any particular work, at least not

ON GETTING SOMETHING TO DO

until they are quite grown up, and yet do very well what they finally go at.

In many occupations the knowledge of other things than just the narrowest field of that occupation is very useful. What is quite as important, the wider our knowledge the wider is our sympathy with our fellowmen and the broader the field of our interests and enjoyments in life. For all these reasons, it is best not to hurry into work that may hold you and become a treadmill for a lifetime. Because a little later you might find a work that you would really enjoy doing, it is better not to give up your school and take the three dollars a week for something that you do not especially care to do.

Many of us have to do work that we do not care to do. But, if it is possible, it is better for the work and better for our happiness if we can find something that we like to do. The longer we put off taking up our life work, within reason, and the longer we spend in general preparation, the more chances we have of finding the work that we shall enjoy doing. And at the same time the more adaptable we become, so that we can the more easily shift our work if we find something we can do better or that needs more to be done. For if we see something that plainly needs to be done, we are happy indeed if we can enjoy doing it just because it is needed. Many people find their lifework in this way. They can not choose entirely as they would like. They do what they must or what needs to be done, and through doing it they learn to be fond of it.

This is so widely true that I would almost say, or at least I would say to many boys: "It doesn't make very much difference what you take up first, if only you have a broad foundation, and then do with all

Wide
knowledge
and sym-
pathy of
value

If we
find some-
thing we
like to do

The boy
the world
is look-
ing for

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

your might whatever offers itself to your hands." In fact, the boy who is strong and well, who is handy and willing, usually has a choice of employment, for the world is eagerly looking for him. It will not pull him out of a corner and set him in a high place. But it will give him all he can do. And as rapidly as he shows that he is willing and able it will find more for him to do.

Leaving
school
from a
sense of
duty

Do not understand that I would advise you to stay in school if your mother needed your earnings. If you give up school from a sense of duty, that is noble. You then go into another school, where one can learn as good lessons as any in books. And besides, no boy that is hungry for knowledge will give up books because he has to give up school. But do not now or later leave school where you are learning much you need to know in order to secure a job because you fear you may not find another.

YOUR UNCLE WILLIAM.

ON DOING IT

MY DEAR HENRY:

Work
to do

As I was saying to your cousin Walter, there is really not much difficulty in getting something to do, if only you are able and willing. To be sure, there are many people who are not able to do much, but if they are at the same time willing to do anything, they will find it and will get on in the world. And, of course, there are some people, though a very few indeed when we push them right hard, who are unable to do anything. We can only be sorry for these, and be easy with them and help them.

The really important thing for a boy or a man is to be determined, when he gets something to do, that he will do it as well as it can be done, or at least a lit-

ON DOING IT

tle better than anybody else can do it. The mistake that many a boy makes is in thinking that the victory is won when he gets a job. In fact, a job is merely a chance, an opportunity, and not of itself success at all. The boy I speak of is the one who "accepts a position." You must imagine him as sitting on a throne, such as the bootblack's chair in a billiard-room, and sucking a cigarette, while Mr. Armour, or Mr. Rockefeller, or some such great employer, comes anxiously forward bearing a commission on a silver tray. And the boy looks very unconcerned, puffs a little nasty smoke into the man's face and "accepts the position." The announcement that ought to be made is that the boy got a chance: a chance to show whether he is fit for service in the world. A boy is not always responsible for the words the local reporter uses about him; but when I know that a boy in his heart "accepts a position," I feel that there is not much hope for that boy.

When Walter was talking of leaving school and taking the place in the bakery, you said, "No, sir! I'm going to school and going to college and study to be a preacher or a doctor, so I won't have to work so hard." Now you are greatly mistaken in thinking that a preacher or a doctor works less than other people. I could tell you a great many things about that, but we haven't time. Only remember that work with the mind is just as much work as that with the hands. Preachers and teachers and doctors that amount to anything all work hard, as do all other people that amount to anything. It is only the idle and lazy people in any kind of work who are always thinking how much easier life is in some other line. And if they were in that other line they would be saying the same thing of the one they are now in.

Do the
work as
well as
it can be
done

"I won't
have to
work so
hard"

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

Whatso-
ever thy
hand find-
eth to do,
do with
might

And so, if you want to succeed, as we all do, give up the thought that it can be done without hard work. However different may be people's notions of success, they must all go over the same road to attain it. Whatsoever thy hand finds to do, that do with all thy might. This is not only the command of duty; it is the rule of success.

How to re-
gard work

But, you say, or at least you think, a boy must have some chance to play, must have some fun in the world. Agreed. You have learned the saying, "All work and no play." But we are not talking about play now. When play time comes I will play with you as heartily as any one. Did it ever occur to you that if you could pretend that work were play and play work you would get a great deal done? Boys have plenty of imagination. They have only to say, "Let's play that we are Indians or kings," or any other delightful thing, and immediately they are. However, it may be straining a boy's imagination too much to play that work is play. Still, you remember how differently the work of whitewashing the fence seemed to Tom Sawyer's friends when they understood that it was an especial privilege to be allowed to do it. There is a thought in this that may help us in thinking about work.

Become
deeply in-
terested

You know how much difference it makes if we are interested in what we are doing. Often we forget the time of day, our friends and foes, and sometimes even our dinner. At least grown people do. Perhaps forgetting dinner is too much to ask of a boy. Aside from actual pain and weariness, what makes a task seem tiresome is watching the clock, thinking of the minutes and hours, and of all the other things we would like to be doing. If we become deeply interested in the task itself, it is no longer tiresome, it is

ON DOING IT

no longer a task, and even what we considered pain and weariness are often gone.

So it would seem that the great question is: how to get interested in one's work. If a boy can do that he has almost succeeded in making work play. In the first place, if a boy has a natural liking for doing some particular thing, he should by all means do that thing if he can get the chance. I would even advise him to give up more pay for doing something that he doesn't like in order to get the work that he does like with less pay, provided he is confident that what he likes is really useful for the world and worth doing.

But it seldom comes natural to boys to like hard work constantly. They often get tired of what they think they like, and need some other spur to keep them at it. And then for many boys it is not possible to get employment at first in just the line they like. How can a boy get interested in, or keep interested in, something that he isn't so very much interested in? There are many answers to this question, and I will give you a few. Among the simplest and the earliest applied are these: Work or take a licking; work or starve. These are not noble spurs to work, but they serve when others fail. They probably served among men in early times before they could understand nobler ones. They still apply to boys, perhaps too much. Work because it wins the smile of father or mother is a nobler reason, and it will serve far and wide for a while; but sooner or later the boy must find another. Work because you must work to succeed, is simply "Work or starve" turned into modern civilized language. Work because Adam was condemned to work as a punishment is a very poor reason indeed, and one that has caused much trouble in the

How to
get in-
terested

Work to
succeed

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

world. The notion that work is a punishment is at the bottom of the whole trouble.

All work
blessed
and noble

Work, I say, because work is a blessed thing; because you and all other men would be wretched, would be mere savages, if you did not work. Learn, first of all, that any work is noble which your fellowmen need to have done. Understand that one kind of work is not higher or lower than another, if men need to have it done for them. If you feel this to be true, you will not look away from your work in discontent to that of some one else because it seems to be higher or nobler. It is true, men pay for some kinds of work much more than for others; but I say to you that the time is coming when there will be much less difference in pay—the time when we shall all agree that whatever is useful and necessary is noble. But every one who works may make his work seem better in his own eyes by understanding this: that whatever work is useful and necessary is noble.

A better
and a
worse way
of doing
a thing

And next to this comes the thought that there is always a better and a worse way of doing anything. Whoever thinks about what he is doing is apt to see some better way of doing it. In this way all the wonderful machines that we know of have come to be. A thoughtful man or woman going faithfully about his work kept thinking how it might be done better and more quickly. Thus were created the loom, the spinning-jenny, the knitting-machine, the cotton-gin, and great numbers of lesser machines. By reading and studying about your work you may find that in other countries they already have better ways of doing it. And if you learn as much as you can about the work nearest in kind to yours, you often see how you and others can work together better and save waste of time and material.

ON FARMING

Then, further, it is only by doing thoroughly and well and willingly what we have to do that we prove our fitness to do something else, and thus we get the chance to do the thing that is more useful or more to our liking. The boy who stops with just what he is told to do is not doing enough. The boy who gets ahead is the one who is always looking for more to do. One of the most successful and useful men I know worked for three or four years at four dollars a week, at the hardest kind of tasks. But his work was never done. Whoever else in the office neglected his work, this boy filled the gap. He was always looking for a chance to help others. If you came to him and said that you were obliged to carry the world the next morning and were afraid it would be too much for you, he would say, "Let me do that; I'll take care of it." He did not carry the world, but he was willing to, and he carried more than any one thought he could, and every year more was put upon his shoulders until to-day people call him a leader and a successful man. But success means to him only that he has a chance to carry a little more of the weight of the world for other people. This man does not play at many games, but he enjoys the great game of life and helping in the world's work more than other men enjoy games. He has made work his favorite game.

By doing thoroughly and willingly we prove fitness for something else

Story of a boy

YOUR UNCLE WILLIAM.

ON FARMING

MY DEAR HERMANN:

When it comes to choosing an occupation, there are so many interesting and delightful things to do in the world that I do not wonder you are puzzled. Whenever I see anybody doing anything well I always wish I could do the same thing. Is it so with

The beauty of mastery of work

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

you? That is one of the beautiful rules of this world, that excellence of any kind tempts people to follow. We soon learn that we can not do everything, but we learn by following the example of those who can do things best. We are never tempted to follow a bungler. And so I have wanted to be a carpenter when I saw a good workman sawing a board to a true line, or planing it perfectly smooth, or making a close-fitting joint. And when I saw a blacksmith handling the white-hot iron and his big hammer with such ease and confidence, welding two pieces into one and bending it so lightly to his will, I have wanted to be a smith. And it seems as though it would be delightful to be almost anything in this world if one could be a master of the work.

Liking for
work leads
to success

And yet if you ask almost any man whether he would advise you to take up his life work as yours he will shake his head or say no in some more vigorous way. However, they do not always mean this. It is only another expression of the feeling so many people have, that any one else's lot is better than their own. Most successful men have some liking for their work and take some pride in it. If it were not so they would not be successful.

Farming
the best
business
on earth

Driving not long since with your uncle Jacob, we passed a man in a wagon drawn by two unkempt ponies very ill-matched in size. They hung their heads in a dejected way, and so did the man in the wagon, sitting on a board laid across the wagon-box. "That man doesn't deserve the name of farmer," said Uncle Jacob. "He mopes along as if he were ashamed of his business. Now I want a farmer to sit up straight and look the world in the face, as though he knew that he was in the best business on earth." And in all of this I entirely agree with Uncle Jacob. If

ON FARMING

I "had my druther," to use a plantation phrase, I would be a farmer. And I suppose if we could all cut the traces from the load we are now drawing, we grown-ups, and could have things just as we liked and do the thing we preferred, that more would go into farming than into any other one occupation. Most of us, to be sure, would prove failures; but I am speaking only of what people dream of doing.

And at the same time people are writing books to explain why the boys leave the farms, why it is hard to get boys to stay on the farms or go to them. It doesn't require a book for the answer. The reasons are in part outgrown and in part imaginary. But both sorts need to be stated and explained. For imaginary reasons are just as strong as any others to keep people from doing things or to urge them on to do things.

There is an impression that farming does not require much ability, that "anybody can be a farmer." This is rapidly being outlived. It takes more different kinds of good qualities to make a good farmer than for almost any other occupation. In the generation past there have been many poor farmers, as a result of the prevalence of this false impression. Then, too, farmers have themselves done something to discredit their occupation by complaining of its drawbacks, though perhaps those who did the complaining were the men who had failed in the business.

In general, the complaints that have been made regarding the occupation of farming are that it demands the most slavish labor and yields the least reward of all the occupations in which free men may engage. It is not possible to disprove this outright. But it does not seem probable that so many men would engage in it, or that any one would remain in

Imaginary
reasons
for leaving
the farm

Good
qualities
to make
a good
farmer

Complaints
against
farming

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

it, if this were quite true. In fact, I am sure that it is not true.

Hours
of the
farmer's
work

There is no doubt that a farmer must work hard if he would succeed. But so must every one else. A farmer's work, like a woman's, is never done. He can work all day and all night and still find more to do. And in some emergencies, when rain is threatening the seasoned hay, or frost the ungathered fruit, he must work day and night. But taking the year round, and when he understands his work properly, he probably need not work harder than other people, unless, like other ambitious people, he works over hours to "get ahead."

The farm-
er's pay

And the farmer receives less reward in the form of money than other people doing equal work, because he has much of his pay "in kind," or "in truck." That is, taking from his own land his fruit and vegetables, his meat, and perhaps his fuel, he handles less money because he does not have to pay out cash for these things. But this is only seeming. Of course, the real question is: What comforts does he have and how much does he save? Here, too, I believe the farmer averages at least as well as other men, if he is not a little more fortunate.

Why men
failed in
farming

One of the reasons for shunning farming is that there have been so many failures in the business. And the reason for the failures was the notion that no training was necessary to make a farmer. Anybody could be farmer. If a man had failed at everything else in the world, let him turn to farming. Now we know better than that. We know that farming is a great and complex business, with a great many specialties, such as stock-raising in all its branches, fruit-growing in all its branches, gardening, grain-growing on the large scale, and so on. We know that it takes

ON FARMING

time and close study to master one or two of these branches. And we know, too, that it requires capital to go into business for one's self in farming as in any other line.

If a boy is to make a business of farming, as I think you intend to do, he should go through a regular apprenticeship to the business with the best farmer he can get work under. He should get all the education he can find time for, in one of the splendid agricultural colleges of our country. And when he has learned enough to feel confidence in himself and saved enough to enable him to begin farming with the proper tools and stock and enough ahead to live on for one year—in case of drought or other unforeseen chance—then he may set up for himself in the most independent of all callings. It has been said of late: Farming is no business for a poor man. And if by poor man is meant a man without capital, this is true. But it is equally true of any other business which requires a plant and tools and stock in trade. If a man has nothing but his hands he must work for others. And he can do this in farming as well as in other lines. It is the dream of every man, I presume, to be independent. But in fact we never become entirely so, and probably it is well for us that we can not. For some of the best parts of our human life are due to the fact that we are dependent on one another.

I think that the best features of the farmer's life are that he can be so much out of doors, that it brings him into such close and constant contact with nature, and that it has so much variety. I believe that these are the points that will appeal to a boy, too. An out-of-door life is certainly the most wholesome, both physically and morally. To be sure, city folks think of the farmer as dirty and bent-over and ill-dressed

Need of
training
for a
farmer

Fine fea-
tures in
the farm-
er's life

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

But he need not be any of these nowadays. Dirty he has to be at times. But he can always wash. It is true, he can not wear his "store clothes" as much of the time as town people who work in stores. But he may be just as comfortable for all that, and perhaps more so. And with reapers and planters and cultivators it is no longer necessary for the farmer to grow doubled up as when he used hand plow and hoe and scythe.

Effect of
telephones,
railways,
and mail
delivery
upon
farmer's
life

The farmer is free from many of the temptations that beset the city man, and especially is this true of the farmer's boy. And he has more fun, with all his hard work, than any boy in the world. There used to be some hardship in being shut off by one's self so much. But that is rapidly ceasing to be so. To say nothing of the increase in fast-going horses, the spread of railroads and electric lines and the still more rapid spread of rural telephones and rural mail delivery, are taking away that element of loneliness which sometimes made the farmer's boy, and still more the farmer's wife, feel like Crusoe on his island.

Variety of
the farm-
er's life

No life has more variety than that of the farmer. He has a dozen specialties to choose from. He can experiment with one while he is depending on another. Each season has its separate engagements. While some of the daily tasks, like the feeding and the milking, become monotonous, this is nothing to the monotony of trade and factory and business routine. No two days are quite alike.

Something has been said of the uncertainty of the farmer's profits. But with greater knowledge and better methods this uncertainty grows constantly less. The farmer's returns are large when they come, and enable him to provide against the day of possible failure.

ON LEARNING A TRADE

And it seems to me that there must be a great satisfaction in the knowledge that one's work is so absolutely essential to mankind and so beyond all doubt useful.

By all means be a farmer. The day will come when the farmer's place in the world will be even better than it is now, and when it will be felt that the farm demands its share of the best brains of the world as well as offers the surest rewards and most wholesome satisfactions.

The farmer's place growing better

YOUR UNCLE WILLIAM.

ON LEARNING A TRADE

MY DEAR GEORGE:

There are so many jolly things to do in this world, and it is so hard to decide, since one can not do them all, that I am sometimes glad I am past my boyhood and no longer have this perplexing problem ahead of me. Notice that I say "sometimes glad," for I do not agree with those doleful longfaces who are always looking back to their youth as the only happy time of their lives and wishing they were young again. Youth is good and so is maturity, and so, I am sure, must age be. Youth has all the world to look forward to. To youth all things are possible, but to maturity some things are actual. It is a joy to dream of doing what you will; it is also a joy to really do what you can. But as for you, you have to find out now what you want to do most, or what you can do best, which ought to mean the same.

What you want to do most and can do best

Some people have foolish notions regarding this or that sort of work as being higher or lower than another. I could never see a difference of high and low in useful labor. Some people have to work in uncomfortable circumstances and on disagreeable mate-

Foolish notions about work

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

rials, as those who work in soap factories and packing-houses and mines and smelters. These usually are paid more than others who work in pleasanter or more wholesome conditions, though not so much more as should be, it seems to me.

The only other difference in wages that seems just is in the case of those who have to spend a long time in learning the work without any pay whatever, as teachers and preachers, or of those who take great risks, as railway employees. It is proper that these receive somewhat more than those who can earn from the beginning, in order to make good the time when they were earning nothing, or in the case of engineers and firemen to make good the loss from accidents.

Every kind of work has its advantages and its disadvantages. To me there are many attractions in a handwork or trade, and especially in the out-of-door trades. I never see a good carpenter at work but I half wish that I might have been a carpenter. In common with some other trades the work gives a man a chance to think between whiles. I do not mean that a carpenter does not need a good head, for he certainly does. But there are times in his work, as in driving nails, in ripping boards, in rough planing, when his mind is not closely occupied, and then he thinks. And the thoughts that come while the muscles are strained, as when hammering or walking, are strong, sinewy thoughts, worth thinking. I have found that men who work at trades have thought deeply and seriously about all sorts of things and are sometimes true philosophers. The greatest moral teacher of this world, Jesus of Nazareth, must have thought a great deal in the quiet thirty years before he began to talk about right living, while he was helping his father build houses in the towns about the

The difference in wages

The trades which give time to think

ON LEARNING A TRADE

Lake of Galilee. A man does not find a philosophy of life all at once. But while Jesus went quietly about his work he had time to think of the problems that met him among his people, and of the doctrines that he heard the rabbis explain in the synagogues.

The carpenter is not the only handworker who has time to think. In our own times I recall two blacksmiths who have been thinkers and philosophers: Elihu Burritt, the apostle of peace, who knew many languages and earned the title of "the learned blacksmith," and Robert Collyer, one of the noblest preachers of our country. People sometimes imagine that men who have much to do with books, as teachers and librarians and editors, must lead a more noble and delightful life, because they seem to have more leisure and are in constant contact with the great minds of the past. But in fact these workers have no more leisure than others, and while they are at work they can not think about what they would, but only about what they must. Their minds being occupied with their tasks, they can not at the same time be thinking of the deep things of life. And this is perhaps the more exasperating because they are thus placed like a beast in a treadmill, while the green pastures of thought where they would like to browse are constantly before their noses. And finally, when their tasks are over, their minds are tired out from use and are not disposed to go to thinking again for pleasure.

Do not misunderstand me. I am not advising you to become a carpenter as the best course to make yourself a scholar. He is seldom successful who tries to be one thing and yet has his mind constantly on something else. A carpenter or a smith must put his mind on his work, and a good mind, too, if he is to be a good smith or carpenter. Only I want you to get rid

Besides
carpentry,
black-
smithing

Drawbacks
in the
life of
people who
work with
books

Need of
good mind
and appli-
cation

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

of the false notion that some kinds of work are higher or more desirable, because they deal more with books and writing. A good mind is needed for success in any line, and a handworker really has more chance to think for himself than those whose business is with books and thinking. A trade is as high and dignified and useful as any other work.

The trade
of the
mason

There is a solid satisfaction in dealing with squares and levels and plumb lines. What wonderful things the stone mason can do with his trowel! The mortar seems to be putty for him: it bends and clings and stays where it is put. What a beautiful game the bricklayer seems to have in building a wall! And if you are looking for something hard, watch the mason fit up and fill the last gap in a stone wall. And what more thoroughly useful work can be found than this of building homes for your fellowmen.

The honest
smithy

The blacksmith has a Fourth of July every day at his forge. Boys and poets, who are only grown-up boys, have always stood about admiring the blacksmith. Along with other charming things, the boys envy him his privilege of getting so very dirty. Well, it is most honest dirt and can be washed off. Every one recognizes the element of mastery in the smith, since he has to wield the heaviest tools and control the most stubborn of metals. The poet sings of "the muscles of his brawny arms," and even the musician hears the harmony of his hammering and works the anvils into his chorus.

Working
in wood

The carpenter's work is cleaner than that of most other handworkers. Oak and pine are so grateful for planing and sandpapering. What a beautiful game it is to trim their curls! And no bottled perfumery can compare with the fine, sweet smell of the fresh-cut wood. The balsam of the forest still clings to the sea-

ON LEARNING A TRADE

soned tree and fills the air when his sawdust blood is shed. "Hew to the line" is the noblest figure for telling the truth, or for making words and life agree. A well-made joint is a satisfying work of art. Carpenter, smith, or mason, and many another trade, they are working constantly toward an ideal—the ideal weld, the ideal joint, the ideal match. And better than some other ideals, they can surely be attained. There is a strengthening of character which comes from over and over again attaining one's ideals. And these handworkers have the satisfaction, too, of not being critics and destroyers; they are engaged for the most part in putting things together. That, too, is a good lesson and a good spirit to cultivate.

Character
grows from
constant
working to
an ideal

One reason why a fellow sometimes gives up the thought of learning a trade is that he thinks he is less independent in a trade than in business or in a profession. Now there are some wrong notions connected with this thought of independence. I suppose, in most cases, the thought that displeases us is that of being "bossed" by some one else. In fact, however, there is scarcely any one in the world who is not bossed by some one else, or if not by a person, then by circumstances, which is perhaps still harder. There is nothing dishonorable in being bossed, and, on the other side, there are many advantages in not being wholly independent. We are all bound to be dependent on one another. And it is well that this is so.

We are all
dependent
on one
another

Independence means risk and worry and possible loss. Still, we shall go on dreaming of being independent and trying to become so. But that need not deter you from learning a trade. There are "boss" carpenters and "boss" masons, and "boss" everything else. If it is your dream to become a "boss" the best way is to prove yourself a master workman before-

Prove
yourself a
master
workman

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

hand. The best boss is the man who knows most about the work. To become a mere overseer it is necessary to be first a good workman. And if you are inclined to become an employer, your success is ensured in part by a thorough knowledge of the details of what your employees are trying to do. And further, to become an employer, or undertaker, in the trades one should have some capital. Unless some capital comes to you by mere luck, you must acquire it by work. And there is no better work in which to do this than a good trade, which at the same time is helping you to build up a strong and healthy body.

Tradesmen
"by the
grace of
God"

The time was when the smith and the mason and the carpenter were the most useful men in the world, and were recognized as such. The time may come again when, together with the farmer, they will recover this standing and be rewarded accordingly. Be a carpenter "by the grace of God."

YOUR UNCLE WILLIAM.

GOING INTO BUSINESS

MY DEAR FLOYD:

Your mother seemed to be rather disappointed when she told me the other day that you had decided that you would go into business. She seemed to feel that you had come down from higher ground than where you stood when you thought of becoming a lawyer, and perhaps that your years in college would be thrown away. I hope she does not expect me to try to argue you out of it, for to tell the truth I quite approve of your purpose.

Profes-
sions not
loftier
than other
walks of
life

The notion that there is something loftier in a profession than in other walks of life is a faint echo of the love of aristocracy, and is passing away with the knowledge that it is impossible any longer to tell just

GOING INTO BUSINESS

what a profession is. So far as there was any distinct sense of higher tone connected with the word and the thing for which it stood, this higher tone is rapidly attaching itself to occupations that were formerly not called professions. On the other hand, quackery and shallowness have encroached so far upon the territory of the old established "learned professions" that dignified and thorough workers in these are sometimes disposed to drop the word. There is an unpleasant contrast in the world's vocabulary between "profession" and "achievement."

Business used to mean in the main the buying and selling of goods, and in general this is doubtless the thought of people to-day when they speak of "going into business." But there are many lines of business which deal in things not usually regarded as commodities, as stocks and bonds, money, insurance, etc., and our notion of business must be wide enough to include these. There is a curious disposition to regard these last-mentioned branches of business as somehow of a higher grade than those which deal in, say, agricultural products. The only sense in which this might be grounded is that they often bring greater profits, and that, as we all know, is no good ground.

One reason why boys have been rather more attracted to business than to the professions has been the notion that not so much time was needed in preparation—that a boy could begin earning money earlier and get rich sooner in business than in a trade or a profession. It is certainly true that a boy can earn more money within the first three years of service at clerking than at a trade, while in the professions he has not yet begun to earn anything in that time. But we want to look at the matter for a lifetime, do we not?

Many
lines of
business

Look at
the matter
for a
lifetime

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

Amusing
motives
for busi-
nesses

I suppose that most boys at a certain stage of their lives have wanted to manage a confectionery store. But when you are told that the confectioner usually encourages his new clerk to eat as much candy as he wants, and perhaps a trifle more, so that he may be cured of the nibbling habit, you can understand that the satisfaction of being a confectioner from that point of view must be short and not unmixed. Many people think that it would be fine to be in the clothier's business so that they might dress in the best broad-cloth, or in the dry goods business, so that their wives might go in precious silks. In fact, the dry goods merchant has to pay for his wife's dresses and the clothier for his fine linen. Such a motive for going into business is, of course, childish.

What con-
trolling
motive
should be

The motives for going into business ought to be the same essentially as for taking up any other life-work. A taste for the occupation, or at least not a distaste for it, and a belief that it is an honorable way of serving one's fellows, these ought, if possible, to be at the bottom of your choice. There have been people who professed to believe that the work of the merchant was necessarily demoralizing. Such a one was Martin Luther, who could hardly see how a merchant could be a Christian. And others, in our own day, have maintained that most merchants are useless parasites or sponges upon their fellows. It seems to me that we can get the right thought of this in a moment. If the merchant does others a service which they need and ask him to do, then his occupation is justified, and he has a just claim for a reward for his services. Now it is easy to see that we can not go to Spain every time we want a pint of chestnuts, or to Holland when we want some Edam cheese. Some one must bring these things over the sea. And as

Services
of the
merchant

GOING INTO BUSINESS

the ship can not sail all over the inland, some one must buy them of the importer and bring them to us. And so on. The wholesaler can not carry the goods about to all those who want small quantities. And so, if we are to buy things at all other than those produced by our next neighbor, there must be merchants large and small, and you need not hesitate about the business.

There are, indeed, mischiefs connected with business, as with all other occupations, and these you will wish to avoid, if possible. Mischiefs connected with his business

I do not see how a merchant can respect himself whose business it is to sell things which on the whole do people more harm than good. Because, in the first place, we are bound to consider the results of what we do, and we are to seek an occupation in which we can serve our fellows. To name a single instance, I could not encourage you to go into business in alcoholic liquors, because the overwhelming balance of the judgment of mankind is that they do more harm than good. I think that something similar may be said of the business of stock-gambling.

An honorable merchant will not try to sell things to people who really do not need them or want them. Of course, people often think, from ignorance, that they do not want things, and it is proper enough to enlighten them. That is part of the merchant's business. It is still worse to encourage people to buy when you know they can not afford the articles you sell them. It is neither good morals nor good business to lead people into debt to you. It was this feature of merchandising that made Martin Luther think so poorly of the entire calling. I will not speak of those devices of common dishonesty included under the general head of misrepresenting the kind and quality An honorable merchant

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

and cost of the things to be sold. We are speaking of honorable business, and it is possible to be dishonest in any calling in life.

The merchants becoming hard-hearted

There is a common impression that business has a tendency to make its servants hard-hearted. Because the merchant makes his profits in small portions from a great number of different people he comes to look at everybody he meets as a possible customer and to value people in proportion to the amount of their trade. Dealing in material things to so large an extent, the merchant is apt to underrate things not material, to ignore spiritual and intellectual interests. The dollar mark is stamped on all he sees. This, I say, is a common impression.

The liberal-minded merchant

While it may be true that there is danger for the merchant in this direction, such materialism is far from universal among merchants. Liberality, charity, geniality are quite as common among merchants as among men of other callings. For merchants have one advantage over most other men, in that they are brought into contact with so many and such a great variety of their fellowmen. And contact with one's fellowmen is almost always broadening and liberalizing. Certainly there is no reason why the merchant may not be as good a man and as useful a man as any one in any calling whatsoever. The history of the modern world is full of examples to sustain this statement.

But the greatest mistake that can be made by a boy who is going into business is to think that he doesn't need much education, or that he is really getting ahead by dropping his books and snatching a clerkship. More and more, the man in every calling must know his relation to all the rest of the world. Especially is this true of the merchant who expects

ON POLITICS

to be a leader. To know the possibilities of the smallest market and any one line of goods he must be able to see the whole world in his mind. To keep up with the times, and a little ahead, as a merchant must, he must know something of times past, that is, of history. He must know and feel the great economic currents of the world's life. A change of fashion in Borneo or Manchuria may compel him to change his line of trade. He must know the good points of the Japanese and the Russians alike. He must not despise men, which usually comes of ignorance. If he knows something of the language of his correspondents in business he has so much more common ground and a certain advantage.

How the
merchant
needs
broad
knowledge

And if you are prosperous, all the more you need the broadest cultivation of your faculties and your tastes so as to be able to use wisely the opportunities which wealth may bring.

YOUR UNCLE WILLIAM.

ON POLITICS

MY DEAR JAY:

You were listening last evening when Professor Stearns said contemptuously, "Oh, I never go near a caucus." You are near to the age when boys begin to be interested in history and politics, and I wondered what effect Mr. Stearns' remark had on you. It is quite a common affair to hear people speak of politics as of something evil or dangerous, and witty slurs upon politics and politicians are part of the stock in trade of the funny men of certain newspapers. "Politician" is a term of reproach somewhere between "confidence man" and "thief." So-and-so says with a virtuous shrug of the shoulders, "I'm out of politics." When a minister or a college professor attends

Wrong
way of
looking at
politics

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

a political convention his friends and colleagues begin to look upon him as queer, or as one who has started on the downward course to ruin.

Now I hope to persuade you that this way of looking at politics is all wrong, and I am more confident that you will be persuaded because I can see that your natural thought of the matter is on my side.

What
politics
really are

Politics means, in the first place, the affairs of the city or State. That is to say, those affairs that are managed by what we call the government or the administration.

There are a great many matters in which we are all concerned, such as our religion and our family affairs, which we find best to leave to each person to manage for himself. But certain other matters we have agreed to manage in common. These are what we call public business. Public business is conducted by public officers, such as councilmen, judges, senators, and so on. Now, politics is the determining what things shall be public business, and how and by whom this business shall be done.

Why we
choose
representatives

In older times and simpler society it seemed sufficient for the people to get together and decide in a common meeting what they wanted done and then for all to lay hold and do it. Even to this day in many places this is the way roads are built. But gradually people have come to see that this method wastes time and does not give good results. Men who make a business of road-building can do the work better than men whose business is farming or anything else. And so in other things. Instead of coming together and discussing all matters in a common meeting, we choose representatives who gather in councils and legislatures, and congresses, and decide things for us. And instead of all gathering to make roads and figure up

ON POLITICS

our public accounts and settle our quarrels, we choose men whom we call public officers, to do these and other things for us. That is politics.

The old way had certain advantages. When the important business was to be done on a certain day in an assembly of all the people, fewer people were disposed to stay away. Meeting everybody was a pleasant thing, and feeling that you were helping in getting things done was interesting and even exciting.

Advantages of the old way

Doing things by second-hand is less attractive. The old saying, "If you want a thing done well, you must do it yourself," may mean, on the other side, that if you do not do things yourself you will lose interest in them, and thus they may be done poorly.

It has been said, in explaining this neglect, "What is everybody's business is nobody's business." And what is nobody's is sure to be picked up by somebody. The public business becomes a stray, a derelict, a maverick. And wrecks and derelicts are picked up by pirates and wreckers. This is a part of the truth. But in our form of government we have turned public business over to certain people, representatives and public officers. And in this condition the neglect is not so easy to see. "Public business is somebody else's business; and what is somebody else's business is not mine." That is where the mischief comes in.

Unfortunate neglect of politics

Now, if public business did not concern every one of us, this way of looking at the matter would not seem so strange.

Public business is everybody's business

In fact, public business concerns every one of us, and to neglect it because we have turned it over to some one else to carry out is just as stupid as it would be to select a driver for your carriage and then say, "It's not my business how he drives; he is the driver."

If in fact you had a poor driver, it would be easy

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

to correct him or to discharge him. But on account of the slow way in which public servants are chosen it would not be possible to call them to account or discharge them as you would an unskilful driver. And therefore we need to be more careful in selecting them.

Law-making the important part of public business

But the selection of officers is the least important part of public business, though it is often made to appear as the most important. A governor is not much more than a business manager, and an auditor is merely a bookkeeper. The really important part of the public business is the law-making, that is, the deciding what we want to have done or not done. Whether we shall have good streets or not, good schools or not, proper protection for our lives and property or not—these and many similar things are decided in the law-making bodies to which we elect representatives. Yet we often lose sight entirely of this most important side of public business in our unwise zeal for the election of this or that man as bookkeeper or business manager.

Wrong conclusion regarding our form of government

Now, many good people have opened their eyes to the necessity for better laws and better officers, at least so far that they go to the voting-places and vote. But because they often find on the ticket a poor choice between the candidates for an office, and no chance at all to speak their wishes about laws, they become discouraged and say that our form of government is a failure.

No form of government is perfect, but ours, of all forms, requires that the people keep their eyes open. It is much easier, in one way, to have a king to rule over you, for then you do not have to think about elections and how the government may be made better. We can not say merely: We vote to have a good

ON POLITICS

government, and then put the matter out of our thoughts. To have a good government we must keep constant watch. Just so one must be constantly alert if he is managing a business or if he wants to make a success of anything. It will not do to grumble and say that we hire other people to do these things for us and that we ought to be relieved of the responsibility. This is a duty that we can not put upon somebody else's shoulders.

Constant
watch the
only way
to make
any busi-
ness suc-
cessful

The first step in making a business go right is to study and understand it. It is easy to understand politics if you will only open your eyes. In our government we have before the grand final choice, which we call the election, a series of trial elections, which we call primaries and caucuses. If you have a series of trial races or contests of any kind it is easy to see that the final winner can not be better than the best entry in the trial contests. So it is in elections.

Easy to
understand
politics

Choosing good officers and good lawmakers in the final elections depends on having good men to choose from, and the candidates are selected at the primaries, and those to be voted on at primaries are in turn selected at caucuses. And often again it is determined, in some preliminary gathering of a few persons, who will be presented to vote on at the caucuses.

Choose
good offi-
cers in the
beginning

It would be very foolish for a man who wished to win a great prize in a contest to say, "I don't care anything about the preliminary contests." Yet that is really the kind of judgment people show who go to the elections but stay away from the caucuses.

The fact is, that the people who think about the subject a good deal are the ones who succeed, in politics as in other business. If we care much for the welfare of our country—and mere selfishness ought to lead us to do that—we must give thought and time

We must
give
thought
and time
to politics,
if we care
for the
welfare
of our
country

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

to politics. If we do not do so, men who merely want to win public offices, and who do give thought to the matter, will manage our politics and make the country serve them instead of serving the country.

To live
for one's
country

It is true, there are many disagreeable things about politics. Political contests are called campaigns. But they are in some respects more trying than real warfare. In war you have only to obey orders, and your enemy is before you. In politics you must judge for yourself, and choose among men who may all be your friends. The warfare of politics is never ended, and there is neither glory nor pension for the veteran. A young man had assured a father that he was willing to die for his daughter. "I am ready to believe you," was the reply; "but what I wish to know is whether you are willing to live for her." The soldier may die for his country. The true politician, the good citizen, has the harder task of living for her. May you be a true politician!

YOUR UNCLE WILLIAM.

EDITOR, TEACHER, OR PREACHER

MY DEAR ROY:

Training
in engi-
neering

There are so many ways of being soundly useful in the world nowadays that few people any longer imagine one profession to be more consecrated than another. For instance, the wide range of special employments devoted to the development of the unused resources of Nature, mostly included under the head of engineering: no work is more useful, requires better trained powers, or receives more prompt and liberal reward. The same venturesome and ingenious spirits that in the time of Sir Francis Drake explored new continents and picked up unprotected treasure-

EDITOR, TEACHER, OR PREACHER

ships now apply themselves to the discovery of new forces and the taming of these forces. A large number of richly endowed schools devote themselves to the training of young men in the various fields of engineering. The preparatory discipline is long and thorough, but the risks and the rewards are sufficient to attract those who feel that they have talents of the sort required.

But still the traditional walks of teaching and preaching entice some choice souls, and I should be glad if I could say a word that would persuade you that here, too, the opportunity for usefulness and the material reward are not so far apart as to altogether discourage young men who feel that they have a right to a share of both. Editor, teacher, and preacher alike set themselves up to be in some sense guides to their fellowmen. In this they form a class apart. Mechanics, merchants, and most other professional men deal chiefly with material things and with the physical welfare of men. The lawyer, while he deals with immaterial interests, is rather a gladiator than a guide. His hands are always up in defence. Even when he serves as a counselor, it is rather to tell people what they should not do rather than to direct them to new courses. Artists of all classes claim to be mere entertainers and disclaim strenuously the office of teacher, although their actual performance is often better than their professions in this respect.

To be sure, no man is without his influence upon the character of others about him. His own conduct and character, if positive, are the most effective arguments for those who know him. In this sense all men are teachers and exemplars. But the editor and the preacher and to some extent the teacher frankly profess the intention to influence the thought and conduct

Teaching and preaching

Lawyer and artist

What the editor and preacher profess

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

of their fellows along the lines of their own actions and convictions. There is manifest in this profession a confidence in the soundness and righteousness of one's own life and sentiments which may well take away the breath of those who do not feel like venturing into these callings. Probably in most cases the one who is disposed to devote himself to one of these professions has not clearly declared to himself what it implies. More likely he is filled with profound conviction on some topic that seems to him vital and feels that he must bring others over to his way of thinking. Or perhaps he is merely under the influence of some strong personality in one of these professions, and it seems to him that to be like this leader and do the same work is the most desirable thing in the world. Young men may easily be led by less commendable influences into the work of their lives.

Conse-
crated with
the obser-
vance: Act
so that
your ac-
tion may
become a
universal
law

But after all, consciously or unconsciously, wholly or in part, the teacher, the preacher, and the editor must feel that they have adopted the rule of the great German philosopher—have adopted a course of life and a set of principles which they can honestly desire to see become universal. This need not mean that the young man sets himself up as holier than his fellows, but only that he believes he sees the right, that he is confident of his own intentions, that he has faith in himself. And woe to the young men who takes up one of these offices with any lower thought, with an eye only to possible loaves and fishes!

Loaves
and fishes

The vision of loaves and fishes never looms large before the would-be teacher or preacher. The opportunities for making money "on the side" are so remote in these professions that few are likely to be seduced by them. Yet they have temptations all their own. Those on the outside often imagine

EDITOR, TEACHER, OR PREACHER

vainly that the incumbents of these two offices lead an easy and luxurious life. Those on the inside know that the preacher is subject to the sin of spiritual pride, and that the teacher suffers from the delusion that anybody who can learn a matter can teach it.

But you are weighing the relative opportunities of these professions. The preacher is most at a disadvantage just now, it seems to me. For so long he has been excluded from the life that now is, has been held to hair-splitting and fancyings regarding realms outside our knowledge, that men of this world have lost patience for hearing him. Or if he gets his feet once planted on the present, they listen sceptically, as though asking him, "What do you know about it?" Yet for these very reasons the preacher's is one of the greatest of all opportunities. It is his opportunity to call back men's thought of religion to the life they are now living, to show forth God in the world, instead of God outside of the world. To do this the preacher must take, must insist on taking, an active part in all the functions of life, private, family, social, political. He must be all things to all men, not merely pretend to be such. He must say with the great Roman, "I regard nothing human as foreign to me." Happily the world is opening its eyes to this situation, and is recognizing that if religion and the preacher's office are to stand they must have this intimate touch with our whole round life.

Relative
opportunities
of the
professions

The
preacher's
one of the
greatest

But it is hard to teach old dogs new tricks, "at which task, nevertheless, the preacher's office labors, and labors often in vain," said Martin Luther once of his own calling. The teacher has the advantage of working on new twigs, "which be more easily bent." It is true, the teacher is outwardly held to the teaching of formal knowledge which does not directly

The
teacher's
advantage

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

affect the formation of character and opinions. But, on account of the flexible condition of the minds and souls he works among, his every word and action counts indirectly toward this end.

Every teacher teaches other things besides his specialty

A school board man once said of a teacher whose conduct was not altogether exemplary, "That makes no difference; we hire him to teach chemistry, not morals." But every teacher, no matter what his specialty, teaches manners and morals and many things besides. Happily there are not many such school board men. Most of them now recognize that sound and positive character is the first and foremost requisite in a teacher. This of itself speaks for the molding impress of the teacher's work.

The teacher's compensation

And one of the great compensations of the teacher's work is that it keeps him in constant contact with the young and hopeful spirits of his time. A good teacher can not grow old in spirit, whatever tales his hair may tell. And, again, there is no possible rating of the joy that comes to an older man from the generous recognition and gratitude of those who have been his pupils. They forget his defects and his rebukes, and associate with his name and face not only his patience and good-will, but all the happy memories of the days of hope and youth.

The editor's function a blending of teacher and preacher

But you, my dear boy, I know, are more drawn to the life of the editor. The editor's function is in some ways a blending of that of teacher and preacher. He is free from traditional trammels. He has an open pulpit. He can preach what he likes or abstain from preaching. This, unhappily, the preacher can not do, but must preach, whether he feels like it or not. The editor comes into contact with all sorts and conditions of men, with all the phases of life. He must know all things, or know at least something about all things.

EDITOR, TEACHER, OR PREACHER

He does not lack variety. His is the life for the man who can not submit to routine. He touches every side of the life of his community. It lies with him to say what will be his effect on this life, for effect he is bound to have.

I have no patience with the editor who maintains that his function is to reflect, not to judge and influence. If your newspaper merely reflects without expressing opinions, this means to your readers that you do not care, that good and bad are both alike to you. And so you have your influence just the same. Only it is a sort of negative influence, which is sometimes worse than a positively bad influence. In all conditions of life, he that is not for the good is against it.

You ask me whether a man can be a successful editor and maintain his integrity of character. I answer most unhesitatingly, yes. I believe that a community will support more readily an editor of positive, if reasonable, opinions than one who endeavors to avoid committing himself or who is always trying to feel out the probable likings of the majority. They say that one and God are a majority. Certainly it is true that a brave and sensible editor with even a small support constitutes a controlling influence in a community. The editor is most truly a molder of public opinion, and woe to him if he fail to recognize the fact and to shoulder his responsibility!

The opportunities of the editor are so manifold. He can cultivate so many different interests. The preacher must change his topic each Sunday, but the editor can keep hammering away until he clinches his argument. In all the world there is no better place for a brave, honest, alert spirit than the editor's chair.

YOUR UNCLE WILLIAM.

The editor
not to re-
fect, but
to judge
and in-
fluence

A brave
and sensi-
ble editor

His oppor-
tunities

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

ON BEING A DOCTOR

MY DEAR WATSON:

False
judgment
about the
physician

Ever since I heard you say, the other day, that you were going to be a doctor "because a doctor could do what he pleased and make so much money," I have wanted to talk with you about the matter. I do not want to keep any one from studying medicine, because the world certainly needs good doctors as much as it needs anything. But I do not want to see you going into any work for life with a wrong thought about it.

The power
of the
physician

I don't wonder that any boy, or girl either, for the matter of that, admires the doctor and wants to be like him. Sooner or later, or to speak more exactly, sooner *and* later, first and last if at no other times, we are all in his hands. Other men have control at times over our fortunes and our circumstances, but the doctor has control of ourselves. The general who is about to lead an army into the enemy's country is stopped by the gout and has to wait till the doctor can conquer this foe before he himself can go on to conquer the other. The commercial king, about to begin the crowning undertaking of his life, consults his doctor, who puts his ear to the king's heart and then shakes his head. The king puts off his crown and sends for his slippers, for his day of heavy work is done.

What his
power
really is

But do not think that the doctor can do as he pleases because he has such great power. It is not, as a rule, those who have great power who do what they please. Power means responsibility, and responsibility is a harness. Only the friendless beggar can do what he pleases. Probably no one in any occupation outside of slavery is so far from being free to

ON BEING A DOCTOR

do what he pleases as the doctor with a practice. Only in the sense that the doctor has voluntarily made himself the servant of others can he be said to do as he pleases. He makes himself a servant of many that he may rule over many.

The greatest privilege in this world is the privilege of being useful to others. And while there are happily a vast number of ways of being useful, there are few that are so certain as the wise service of a wise doctor; few cases in which the need for help is so distinctly felt, the appeal so urgently made, and the gratitude for even a little assistance so immediate and so sincere. "Run for the doctor" is the call; but nobody ever runs for a lawyer, a teacher, or a preacher. And when he has spoken and given us his pills, little or big, we are always a little relieved because we feel that all that was possible has been done.

Perhaps you noticed that I spoke of the wise service of a wise doctor. Just because the doctor's opportunities are so vast and the need of him so great there is also, unfortunately, an opportunity for a great deal of bungling and deceit. Fools rush in where angels fear to tread, close followed by knaves. I must not stop to consider those who seek the practice of medicine as a means to low and vile ends. I will say only that such persons deserve the contempt of all honest people, and really receive it, and deserve further the severest punishments of the law, which they do not receive in due measure. If there is an unpardonable sin, it is that of claiming the livery of the ministration of mercy for selfish or vicious ends.

What I especially want to say to you is, that there is no nobler work in the world than that of physician, and to urge you, if you have some inclination toward it, to make up your mind to consecrate yourself to it

The wise
service of
the wise
doctor

The evil
service of
a knavish
doctor

No nobler
work than
that of
the good
physician

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

Remuner-
ation

doctor: namely, that he makes so much money. There is no doubt that a good doctor can make considerable money. But I should have a poor opinion of the doctor who goes into the work chiefly for the purpose of making money, just as I should have a poor opinion of any one else whose chief object is making money. In fact, I think not many doctors become really rich, although a competent doctor can always make a good living. But it is a matter of pride with doctors, and a very noble pride, too, that they never refuse to help a person because he is unable to pay. When a man becomes a doctor he takes a long and solemn oath, which a Greek physician, Hippocrates, who lived nearly twenty-five hundred years ago, is said to have required of his disciples. This oath binds the doctor to be clean and honest, and never to refuse aid to the poor. This oath is as fine as that which knights used to have to take in the days of chivalry. And while I suppose not all doctors live up to its promises, as not all knights lived up to theirs, it is a credit to the profession which holds up such ideals. Every doctor can show you a long, long list of calls which he never expects to be paid for in money.

The Hip-
pocratic
oath

A useful,
active,
self-sacri-
ficing life

And so, my dear boy, you are looking at it the wrong way when you think of becoming a doctor in order to make money and do just as you please. But if you want to be one of the most useful men in your town, to lead a very active and a self-sacrificing life, but one full of the highest and best joy, by all means make up your mind to become a doctor, and do not be satisfied until you have become the best doctor in your town or in your State if possible.

YOUR UNCLE WILLIAM.

1

To avoid fine, this book should be returned on
or before the date last stamped below

10M-12-98

--	--	--

Stanford University Libraries



3 6105 020 006 487

STANFORD UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
STANFORD AUXILIARY LIBRARY
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 94305-6004
(650) 723-9201
salcirc@sulmail.stanford.edu
All books are subject to recall.
DATE DUE

JUN 17
JUN 20 2000
2001

